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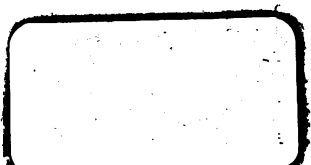
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John W. ...

JOHN RUSKIN: HIS LIFE AND WORK

Inaugural Address delivered before THE RUSKIN SOCIETY
OF GLASGOW, 28th October, 1880.

JOHN RUSKIN
HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY
WILLIAM SMART, M.A.

THIRD THOUSAND



GLASGOW
WILSON & McCORMICK, SAINT VINCENT STREET
1883





IT is no light task that falls upon me, as President of this Society, to deliver its inaugural address. I am conscious that I have before me comparatively few who come as members of the Ruskin Society, or as sympathizers with its work ; and that the bulk of my audience is composed of those who hold very different opinions ;—from those who look upon John Ruskin merely as a brilliant writer on Art, down the varying scale, to those who come to hear something in defence of one they consider a mere enthusiast.

To the former class I feel that I can say very little that is new, not being by any means the best qualified among them to say even that : while, in regard to the latter, I am aware that, by want of skill in setting forth the truths Mr. Ruskin has devoted his life to teach, I may raise such a prejudice against him in their minds as will vitiate any effect that the chance reading of his works might hereafter have. And when, looking around me, I see not only those whose views of life must have been more or less shaped by commercial pursuits, but also many whose lives have been spent in the domain of thought, and in the search for truth, I realize most fully the responsibility attaching to one who preaches what may seem a new gospel.

Of you, then, who know Mr Ruskin and his writings as well as I do, I must beg indulgence if I traverse ground which is already a beaten track to you, while I speak to that wider part of my audience which knows him only by name and his writings by report.

There is probably no other great writer of whom so little is now known, and that after forty years of continuous literary work, as John Ruskin. One knows him not at all—not even by name : another knows him only as an art critic : a third, as an aesthetic philosopher, whose work on art has unfitted him for any practical views of life, and made him a dangerous guide in morals. A more numerous class regard him as a dreamer, or, less ambiguously, an amiable madman.

For it is a sorrowful fact that a self-styled practical world is just as apt, in the nineteenth century, Anno Domini, to say of its greatest men, as it did four thousand years ago, “behold this dreamer cometh ;” or, at a later date, and of a greater than man, “he hath a devil and is mad.” And, of our madman, we must again answer as one of the same class did for himself—‘Not mad, most noble world, but speaking forth the words of truth and soberness.’

It would be curious, and perhaps interesting, to examine the grounds on which an arrogant ignorance fixes the stigma of madness on Mr. Ruskin, but I will only mention *three*, and, for refutation, do little more than leave it to your good judgment, when I have set forth his teaching, with such extracts from his works as may be necessary.

For seventeen years Mr. Ruskin's name was in every one's mouth as the model and mirror of prose writers. His grace of diction was unequalled ; his canons of art stood firm against all criticism ; the loftiness of his moral teaching was almost inspired. But, one day, the unequalled style, the stern logic, and sterner purity of mind, were all concentrated into one sweeping denunciation of the social system of the nineteenth century ; declaring that our greed of gold had led us to such a state of wretchedness, degradation, and folly as were never witnessed before in any state, savage or civilized, and that, for salvation of the nation, we must return to the simple rules of our Master, Christ. Naturally, the practical world resented the imputation that its boasted civilization was a mistake. The merchant derided the idea that he existed, not that he might make money for himself, but that his employes might live. The professional man did not like being told that, in the soul of things, he deserved less reward than the agricultural labourer, for his work, because his real reward was *in* his work, while the labourer's was *for* it. And one and all declared that the Sermon on the Mount was a beautiful ideal—but totally impracticable.

Strong words, my friends, but I hope to show you,—or, if I cannot, it is my fault, not his,—that Mr. Ruskin asks no more, in any book of his, than that man should obey the law of life given from Christ's own mouth : and the newspaper press of this country, by its almost unanimous derision of his later books, shows how far we have fallen from any realization of pure religion.

But he is content to take lower ground than this. Even supposing that our hopes for a future life be taken as groundless,—that our faith is vain,—and that the ears of those who have travelled to the farthest confines of thought have heard only the cry of a fatherless world, Mr. Ruskin takes his stand on those simple laws of justice and mercy which constitute the morality underlying *all* religions of the world, and says no more and no less, than that the nation which has left these must retrace its steps, or, as a nation, perish. Maybe a gloomy view, but, assuredly, not a mad one!

Another ground of his supposed madness merely rests in the general—and no less foolish than general—opinion that anything worth knowing can be known at a casual reading, and that all truth is expressed in one unvarying mode of simplicity. Those who judge thus forget that scholars and thinkers for the last eighteen hundred years have been digging deep in the resources of one book alone, and do not seem to have at all exhausted them; they forget the innumerable commentaries on our own Shakespeare, as well as on every other great writer of the past; they forget the somewhat amazing fact that there is one man, now living, confessedly the greatest thinker of modern times, whose books are yet not understood by even a tithe of the reading public—Thomas Carlyle.

That two men should give forth substantially the same message—the one, indeed, everywhere acknowledging the other as master—and yet the one be honoured, the other

scorned, seems due to the fact that Carlyle's rugged strength carries conviction of its truth, even where only slightly understood:—just as the grip of death carries conviction of the existence of a God to the dullest blockhead. But Mr. Ruskin, with a strength of conviction, and force of eloquence not second to Carlyle, has a heart as gentle and womanlike as it is strong; it pities and loves even where it despises: his amazement at the blindness which does not realize, and the indifference which allows, the festering mass of human misery around, bursts out in passionate, uncontrollable indignation: he is driven to preach recklessly, as it seems, in season and out of season:—conjuring for love, threatening by prophecied calamity, startling by strange rhetoric, if, by any means, he may awake a world which sleeps on the verge of its ruin.

As usual the newspapers, catering more for the amusement than the good of their readers, and neglectful of their mighty, almost infinite responsibility, take care to publish those parts of his writings which may raise a smile or provoke a sneer. But, if ever the canon of criticism put forth by himself applied to any one, it does to him:—
** "Be sure," he says, "if the author is worth anything you will not get at his meaning all at once—nay, that at his whole meaning you will not for a long time arrive in any wise. Not that he does not say what he means, and in strong*

* SESAME AND LILIES, p. 13.

words too ; but he cannot say it all ; and what is more strange, will not but in a hidden way, and in parables, in order that he may be sure you want it."

There is a third ground for the accusation of madness which I can only touch with reverent hands.

Endowed with that rare delight in nature granted only to great painters and poets, he has seen into nature and its mysterious connections with the powers above us as we cannot see. Not without reason did Wordsworth write :—

*"To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."*

and the wonderful ways in which, to the poet, external nature symbolizes and enshrines the spiritual, are apt to excite ridicule among those of whom Peter Bell was pilloried as everlasting type in the famous "yellow primrose" stanza.

And, as devoting all his life to Art, he has had to face the mysterious study of the meaning of the many religions which have only, or *best*, expressed themselves in their art : he has had the problem continually before him of reconciling the art, the religion, and the history of peoples.

But when, as result of all this life-long study, he proclaims, that not alone in Protestantism, not even in all the Churches which unite themselves only under the name of Christian,—but *everywhere*,—in all art, in all religions, in all history,—he finds God working : that even the Greek myths have lessons for us Christians : and that in that far-off age the storied

heroes and demigods were probably such messengers as God saw fit for the times—of course the modern religious world which prays weekly for a Church Universal, but hates the rival denomination over the way, finds this man an enthusiast, a dreamer, a madman—even a dangerous one.

But let any one who thinks such ideas merely the extravagance of a poet's dream, in his next woodland walk, try at anyrate to imagine that the flowers which meet his careless eye have a something resembling human life,—that the rose blushes with delight in our admiration, and the lily grows pale with rapture ; let him fancy that the dog which leaps and gambols responsive to the joy in his master's eye, or crouches sadly sympathetic in his sorrow, has a counterpart in all the living things that too often shrink and fly from the ill-usage they have learned to expect ; let him only try to imagine all this, and *human* life will become more sacred to him ; he will get a better idea of John Ruskin,—and of God.

I would it were *possible* to give you any idea how foolish and cruel this imputation of madness, or anything approaching to it, is. If it were only himself who was now addressing you, instead of a very humble though faithful disciple : if you could see that spare stooping figure, that rough hewn kindly face, with its mobile, sensitive mouth, and clear deep eyes, so sweet and honest in repose, so keen, and earnest and eloquent in debate, you would feel how noble and true a gentleman he is. But a life spent in unselfish work has

well earned the repose which sixty years demand. We cannot hope for many more public appearances from him ; and we must accept his own statement as final, when he says that he has told us what truth it is necessary for us to know, and that, if we will not learn from what he has already written, he can teach us no more. But I must warn you in this, that unless you approach the study of his works with somewhat of a belief in the man, and of sympathy with him, you will come little speed.—* “ *It is quite possible,*” he says, “ *for the simplest workman or labourer for whom I write to understand what the feelings of a gentleman are, and share them, if he will ; but the crisis and horror of this present time are that its desire of money, and the fulness of luxury dishonestly attainable by common persons, are gradually making churls of all men ; and the nobler passions are not merely disbelieved, but even the conception of them seems ludicrous to the impotent churl mind ; so that, to take only so poor an instance of them as my own life—because I have passed it in almsgiving, not in fortune-hunting ; because I have laboured always for the honour of others, not my own, and have chosen rather to make men look to Turner and Luini, than to form or exhibit the skill of my own hand ; because I have lowered my rents, and assured the comfortable lives of my poor tenants, instead of taking from them all I could force for the roofs they needed ; because I love a wood walk better than a London street ; and*

* FORS IV., 41-103.

would rather watch a seagull fly than shoot it, and rather hear a thrush sing than eat it ; finally, because I never disobeyed my mother, because I have honoured all women with solemn worship, and have been kind even to the unthankful and the evil ; therefore the hacks of English art and literature wag their heads at me, and the poor wretch who pawns the dirty linen of his soul daily for a bottle of sour wine and a cigar, talks of the 'effeminate sentimentality of Ruskin.' ”

It is then in the hope of convincing you that in Mr. Ruskin we have not merely a great writer, but a great teacher, that I have chosen to speak of his *life* as well as his work.

We Scotch get the name of being hard-headed. We are ready to suspect and despise humbug and sham—having so much in us at anyrate of the man we boast as one of our race. We do not easily believe in a man who preaches one thing and lives another. * “*I am convinced,*” says Ruskin himself, “*that it is by his personal conduct that any man of ordinary power will do the greatest amount of good that it is in him to do.*” And I think I am right in supposing that you will the more readily credit his teaching, when I can show you how entirely noble, and, in the truest sense, consistent, his whole life has been.

John Ruskin was born in London in February, 1819.—† “*My father,*” he says, in one of the autobiographical passages

* FORS II., 21, 2.

† FORS I., 10, 5.

in the Fors., "*began business as a wine-merchant, with no capital, and a considerable amount of debts bequeathed him by my grandfather. He accepted the bequest and paid them all before he began to lay by anything for himself, for which his best friends called him a fool, and I, without expressing my opinion as to his wisdom, which I knew in such matters to be at least equal to mine, have written on the granite slab over his grave that he was 'an entirely honest merchant.'*"

His parents were cousins, and of Scotch descent. Probably in virtue of this Scotch blood they were somewhat severe in their training of this, their only son. A lonely child, with no companions, scant toys, and few books, he grew up a quiet, meditative boy. His books, however, if few, were of the best.—* "*I had Walter Scott's novels, and the Iliad, (Pope's translation), for my only reading when I was a child, on week days: on Sundays their effect was tempered by 'Robinson Crusoe' and the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' my mother, having it deeply in her heart to make an evangelical clergyman of me. Fortunately, I had an aunt more evangelical than my mother; and my aunt gave me cold mutton for Sunday's dinner, which—as I much preferred it hot—greatly diminished the influence of the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' and the end of the matter was, that I got all the noble imaginative teaching of Defoe and Bunyan, and yet—am not an evangelical clergyman. I had, however, still better teaching than theirs, and that compulsorily and every day of the week. Walter Scott and Pope's Homer*

were reading of my own election, but my mother forced me, by steady daily toil, to learn long chapters of the Bible by heart ; as well as to read it every syllable through, aloud, hard names and all, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, about once a year ; and to that discipline—patient, accurate, and resolute—I owe, not only a knowledge of the book, which I find occasionally serviceable, but much of my general power of taking pains, and the best part of my taste in literature.”

* “For toys,” he says, “I had a bunch of keys to play with, as long as I was capable only of pleasure in what glittered and jingled ; as I grew older, I had a cart, and a ball ; and when I was five or six years old, two boxes of well-cut wooden bricks. With these modest, but, I still think, entirely sufficient possessions, and being always summarily whipped if I cried, did not do as I was bid, or tumbled on the stairs, I soon attained serene and secure methods of life and motion ; and could pass my days contentedly in tracing the squares and comparing the colours of my carpet ;—examining the knots in the wood of the floor, or counting the bricks in the opposite houses. . . . But the carpet, and what patterns I could find in bed-covers, dresses, or wall papers to be examined, were my chief resources, and my attention to the particulars in these was soon so accurate, that when at three and a half I was taken to have my portrait painted by Mr. Northcote, I had not been ten minutes alone with him before I asked him why there were holes in his carpet.”

* FORS V., 51-55.

Whatever we may think of the wisdom of such training, it is to this limitation of books and toys that he owes that habit of attention to particulars, that power of concentration, and that delight in little things, which have made him at once so great as a writer and an art student. Every year his father made a two months' driving tour through England on business, and if, in the course of the mid-day drive there were any gentleman's house to be seen, his father baited the horses, and father, mother, and son went reverently through the state rooms.—* “*My father,” he says, “had a quite infallible natural judgment in painting. . . . He never, when I was old enough to care for what he himself delighted in, allowed me to look for an instant at a bad picture ; and if there were a Reynolds, Velasquez, Vandyck, or Rembrandt in the rooms, he would pay the surliest housekeepers into patience until we had seen it to heart's content ; if none of these, I was allowed to look at Guido, Carlo Dolce—or the more skilful masters of the Dutch School,—Cuyp, Teniers, Hobbina, Wouvermans ; but never at any second-rate or doubtful examples.*”

It was the fond hope of his friends that he would enter the Church—“He might have been a Bishop,” said his mother once, with tears in her eyes ; but the young man's mind was early turned to his future work by getting a present of Roger's Italy, illustrated by Turner, in whom he hence-

* FORS V., 56-227.

forth became an ardent believer. His first education was done under worthy tutorship in his father's house, from which he went straight to Christ Church, Oxford. The Newdigate Prize for the poem "Salsette and Elephanta," and a complimentary fourth class pass, were his only achievements. But under Dr. Buckland he laid the foundation of that thorough geological knowledge which became so valuable to him as an art critic. Thereafter he studied the elements of drawing and painting under Copley Fielding and J. D. Harding, and spent much of his time in the galleries of Italy.

At the age of twenty-four appeared the first volume of his great work 'Modern Painters.' Originating, as he says, in indignation at the shallow and false criticism of the periodicals of the day on the works of Turner, it had amplified itself into something very like a treatise on Art. Turner was now sixty-eight. Five years before he had painted the Old Temeraire, and he was still in the zenith of his power. For years he had held the leading place among the landscape painters of England, but his fame had lasted too long for a novelty-loving public, and the press had begun to write him down. Public taste, to use Ruskin's words, was seemingly plunging deeper and deeper in degradation every day, in admiration of all that was theatrical, affected, and false in art. Never was such a daring attempt. For a youth of twenty-four to take up the position that Turner was the greatest landscape painter the world had ever seen, and to prove it by

formulating the before unwritten canons of art, was Titanic work ;—but never was daring crowned with such success. Henceforth Turner's place in art was secure, and Ruskin took his own place in the first rank of English writers.

'Modern Painters' remains, perhaps, the most wonderful example of youthful genius extant. The reader cannot but be amazed that the exact observation of nature, and the exhaustive study of the productions of painters, ancient and modern, could have left time for the grasp and extent of erudition its evidences. But, if for nothing else, Ruskin deserves the thanks of succeeding generations for elevating criticism of Art into an art of itself, and delivering us from the diatribes of those who thought that the only thing necessary to criticize the productions of the brush was the possession of a pen.

Three years later appeared the second volume ; ten years after that, volumes third and fourth ; and the last volume in 1860. Between times, in 1849, appeared the 'Seven Lamps of Architecture,' being an application of the principles of 'Modern Painters' to the sister art ; and, in 1851, the 'Stones of Venice,' being a discourse on the history, art, and moral decline of that Queen of Cities. It is, of course, impossible to do any justice to these three stupendous treatises on Art in a few sentences. I give Mr. Ruskin's own epitome :—
" 'MODERN PAINTERS' teaches the claim of all lower nature on the hearts of men : of the rock and wave and herb as a part of their necessary spirit life. It declares the perfectness and

eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to that." Of the others, he says, that they "teach the laws of constructive art, and the dependence of all human work or edifice for its beauty on the happy life of the workman."

In 1860, after some minor works, lectures, and pamphlets, appeared the famous four essays in the 'Cornhill,' reprinted under the title of 'Unto this Last,' being an attack on the popular conception and tendency of Political Economy. They were founded on the perfectly just basis that Political Economists of the school of Mill and Ricardo, instead of analyzing the true economy of a State, had analyzed the modern outcome of wealth and money-making as it exists in the present corrupt state of society, and had taught their students that the deductions from this were the eternal laws of wealth and commerce. 'Unto this Last' expounds the true economy of a State which takes for its first aim the healthy and happy life of the people; and, at the same time, it teaches that the first duty of the citizen is to carry out this true Economy in his own life and business.

'Mumera Pulveris,' six essays on the Elements of Political Economy, soon followed, being an expansion of the same views,—'Political Economy plus Philanthropy,' as it was scornfully called.

The part of his life during which he was writing these was spent partly at home, partly in Italy and Switzerland;

all his energies being given to ascertain the truth of natural forms, fixed and accidental. No one will ever have any idea of the actual art work he did in the course of his long life, in study and preparation for his books. It is with no amateur we are dealing. What he might have been as an artist, and what he resigned in not becoming one, is enough evidenced by such of his drawings as have seen the light.

And here I must ask you to note how perfectly and entirely noble his art life has been. Endowed with every capacity to be a great artist, seeing and loving nature as only poets do, watching and catching her varying moods as only painters can, and with a technical aptitude which might have been the willing slave of these, he had the strength of self-denial to follow the advice he gives to others—“*In a general way remember that it is far better to find out other great men than to become one yourself, for you can but become one at the best, but you can bring others to light in numbers*”—advice which I cannot but think most essential in an age when every man thinks his own half-digested opinions as good as the life thoughts of a great man.

But this is the key-note of Ruskin's whole life,—it has been entirely spent for others. He has gone through life with all the chivalry of a knight of old, a freelance for the defence of what was noble and true against the base and the churlish. First, as the champion of Turner ; then as the champion of the noble in art against the untrue and the degrading ; then in the defence of all natural beauty against

man's desecration ; finally, standing forth against those foul forms of our national life which degrade man while they increase gold—you will find equally perfect consistency throughout his life and his teaching ; he has never worked for honour or reward, but always for others.

Of his various other works on life, art, mythology, &c., written between 1860 and 1870, valuable as they are, I have no time to say anything, except that 'Sesame and Lilies,' and the 'Crown of Wild Olive,' contain perhaps the finest passages in the whole range of English prose, the former in the lecture entitled 'Queens' Gardens,' the latter in the lecture on War.

In 1870 Oxford honoured herself by appointing him to the chair of Fine Art, then newly founded. As a Professor, I may say that he roused the passionate enthusiasm of his students. Indeed his personal influence has always been notoriously so powerful that he made it a point of honour in Oxford not to mix much personally with his students, in case he should be suspected of unduly influencing them. And from my own experience, limited as it has been, I can endorse what those nearest him have said to me—"he is a man one could die for,—or better, live for."

One episode at Oxford was much talked of, and laughed at, at the time—the "digging." As usual, Mr. Ruskin, looking out for other people's good, thought that the superfluous energy the men got rid of on the river and in the gymnasium, might be profitably and pleasantly spent to some good end.

"Will none of you," he said, "of your strength and your leisure do anything for the poor—drain a single cottage, repair a single village byeway—and you yourselves will be more strong, and your hearts more light, than had your leisure been spent in costly games, or more hurtful amusement." About fifty men responded, and set to work under Ruskin's old head gardener to make a road past a few cottages which were without a decent bye-way. The digging went on vigorously for some time, but eventually the diggers dropped off, and the scheme was abandoned,—chiefly, I have been informed by one of the diggers, because the rustics stood round with their hands in their pockets and laughed! If there is one thing which is harder for the ordinary English gentleman to stand than another, it is to be laughed at.

In 1871, a year after taking the Art Chair, he began the 'Fors Clavigera,' that much derided and much misunderstood series of Letters to the Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain. A few words as to the causes which led to this step. An intense admirer of Carlyle, he shared with him the expectation that the higher classes would gradually come to realize their duty toward the lower. But all that Carlyle had written in 1843, when he began 'Past and Present' with the words:—"The condition of England is justly regarded as one of the most ominous, and withal one of the strangest ever seen in this world. England is full of wealth, of multifarious produce, supply for human want in every kind; yet England is dying of inanition."—remained true in 1871.

Ruskin saw and felt, as only a true man can, that the lust of gold was debasing our humanity ; that, against it, all the revelation of that nature which it desecrates, and all the rights of man which it tramples on, are powerless.

But Carlyle had ended his life work, and was silent : the mighty pen that had written the ‘ Latter Day Pamphlets,’ was laid down, and men had already forgotten the prophecy of woe and warning. A first place in the national literature was indeed awarded him without question. His books were such as ‘ no gentleman’s library is complete without ’; but of practical following of his teaching there was nothing. His winged words lay deep in some few scholars’ hearts, but from the leaders of labour to whom he trusted there came no response. No landowner stirred from his position as heaven-appointed beatitude ; statues to Hudson still remained the national sculpture ; and the gulf between rich and poor yawned yet wider and deeper.

On 1st January, 1871, Ruskin began the ‘ Fors Clavigera ’ with the memorable words:—*“Friends, we begin to-day another group of ten years, not in happy circumstances. Although, for the time, exempted from the direct calamities which have fallen on neighbouring states, believe me, we have not escaped them because of our better deservings, nor by our better wisdom ; but only for one of two bad reasons, or for both : either that we have not sense enough to determine in a great national quarrel which side is right, or that we have not courage to defend the right, when we have discerned it. I believe that both these*

bad reasons exist in full force ; that our own political divisions prevent us from understanding the laws of international justice ; and that, even if we did, we should not dare to defend, perhaps not even to assert them, being on this first of January, 1871, in much bodily fear ; that is to say, afraid of the Russians ; afraid of the Prussians ; afraid of the Americans ; afraid of the Hindoos ; afraid of the Chinese ; afraid of the Japanese ; afraid of the New Zealanders ; and afraid of the Caffres : and very justly so, being conscious that our only real desire respecting any of these nations has been to get as much out of them as we could. They have no right to complain of us, notwithstanding, since we have all, lately, lived ourselves in the daily endeavour to get as much out of our neighbours and friends as we could ; and having by this means, indeed, got a good deal out of each other, and put nothing into each other, the actually obtained result, this day, is a state of emptiness in purse and stomach, for the solace of which our boasted 'insular position' is ineffectual. I have listened to many ingenious persons, who say we are better off now than ever we were before. I do not know how well off we were before ; but I know positively that many very deserving persons of my acquaintance have great difficulty in living under these improved circumstances : also, that my desk is full of begging letters, eloquently written either by distressed or dishonest people ; and that we cannot be called, as a nation, well off, while so many of us are either living in honest or in villanous begging. For my own part, I will put up with this state of things, passively, not an hour longer. I am not an

unselfish person, nor an Evangelical one ; I have no particular pleasure in doing good ; neither do I dislike doing it so much as to expect to be rewarded for it in another world. But I simply cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky, when there is any—which is seldom, now-a-days, near London—has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. Therefore, as I have said, I will endure it no longer quietly ; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery. But that I may do my best, I must not be miserable myself any longer ; for no man who is wretched in his own heart, and feeble in his own work, can rightly help others. Now my own special pleasure has lately been connected with a given duty. I have been ordered to endeavour to make our English youth care somewhat for the Arts ; and must put my uttermost strength into that business. To which end I must clear myself from all sense of responsibility for the material distress around me, by explaining to you, once for all, in the shortest English I can, what I know of its causes ; by pointing out to you some of the methods by which it might be relieved ; and by setting aside regularly some small percentage of my income, to assist, as one of yourselves, in what one and all we shall have to do ; each of us laying by something, according to our means, for the common service ; and having amongst us, at last, be it ever so small, a National Store instead of a National Debt."

And farther on:—* “ *What am I, myself then, infirm and old, who take, or claim, leadership even of these lords? God forbid that I should claim it; it is thrust and compelled on me—utterly against my will, utterly to my distress, utterly, in many things, to my shame. But I have found no other man in England, none in Europe, ready to receive it,—or even desiring to make himself capable of receiving it. Such as I am, to my own amazement, I stand—so far as I can discern—alone in conviction, in hope, and in resolution, in the wilderness of this modern world. Bred in luxury, which I perceive to have been unjust to others, and destructive to myself; vacillating, foolish, and miserably failing in all my own conduct in life—and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion—I, a man clothed in soft raiment,—I, a reed shaken with the wind, have yet this Message to all men again entrusted to me: ‘Behold, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Whatsoever tree therefore bringeth not forth good fruit shall be hewn down, and cast into the fire.’*”

These words contain the foreshadowing and the justification of that much misunderstood scheme of St. George's Guild. For seven years Mr. Ruskin wrote the monthly letters of the *Fors Clavigera*, in which the scheme was gradually unfolded. Briefly put, it starts from the proposition that no man, whatever his rank or wealth may be, is exempted from work and responsibility for that work; and that the noblest, as well as the most natural form of existence, is that spent in producing the first necessities of life,

* FORS. V., 58, 281.

viz., in agricultural labour. I need scarcely say that this is not the view of modern society. It seems to be held, now-a-days, that, while ownership of land is the most honourable social condition of man, labour *on* the land is, of all labour, the least honourable: whence it comes that the position of the agricultural labourer is, of all others, the most deplorable—Hodge having formed the theme of English caricature for the last half century as the type of animal stupidity. It is generally considered as the undoubted right and privilege of the landowner to keep bird and fish and beast in healthy life on his broad moors, and clear streams, although his tenants should starve in miserable hovels; and, broadly speaking, it is held as the mark of a gentleman that he soil his hands with no manual labour, but kill time, and spend money in any destructive or harmless way he pleases.

The Guild then proposed to become a land-owning Society, carrying out the principles which Mr. Ruskin conceives that all land owners would carry out if they were patriotic instead of selfish. In his own words:—“*The St. George's Guild consists of a body of persons who think, primarily, that it is time for honest persons to separate themselves intelligibly from knaves, announcing their purpose, if God helps them, to live in Godliness and honour, not in atheism and rascality: and who think, secondarily, that the sum which well-disposed persons usually set aside for charitable purposes, (namely, the tenth part of their income,) may be most usefully applied in buying*

land for the nation, and entrusting the cultivation of it to a body of well taught and well cared for peasantry."

So much has been said about the Utopianism of this scheme, that I may have some difficulty in convincing you that it is the practical project of a practical man. It has been saddled with the name of Communism, and I suppose that that name, in these days of shallow opinion, is enough to discredit any society. But Mr. Ruskin is a Communist—just as he is a Conservative—in a sense very different from the ordinary acceptation of the term. There is nothing in the constitution of the Guild which any consistent Christian could not approve of, and adhere to. Its members, indeed, bind themselves that they will not deceive, nor cause to be deceived, any human being for their gain or pleasure : nor hurt, nor cause to be hurt, any human being for their gain or pleasure : nor rob, nor cause to be robbed, any human being for their gain or pleasure—which might interfere with some operations of respectable commercial pursuits : and that they will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing ; but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty, upon the earth—which might interfere with some of our sport, and much of our thoughtless cruelty. The idea of Communism has arisen from a confusion of the Guild with the labourers employed by it. We of the Guild, generally speaking, live exactly as we always did, in our usual avocations, not becoming anything more marked

in the world than, presumably, honest, God-fearing men. But, on the lands of the Guild, no steam machinery is allowed in agriculture—for reasons which I shall afterwards explain. The rivers are kept pure from pollution, and, generally speaking, all natural beauty is held as sacred. The farmer's rent is fixed for life, if he conform to the requirements of the Guild ; but is diminished for every improvement he makes on the land. The rents do not go to any private interest or dividend, but are paid back to the tenants in the shape of improvement of the Guild lands generally. No one is allowed to live in squalor or wretchedness, the first business of the Guild being to see that its tenants have the necessary conditions of healthy and happy life. The labourers under the Guild farmers are paid fixed wages, unalterable, undiminished in time of sickness ; and, when unable to work, they will think it no more shame to live on pension from the Guild than a government official thinks shame to take a pension from his government. On each estate the Guild provides the means of intellectual and physical recreation as well as education. The children are trained on the lines of education laid down for them by the founder of the Guild.

Is there anything in this so very unpractical ? It is true that we have here a Society paying in a tithe of the income of its members, and not expecting a five per cent. for it—not even a return of the principal ; which is something new, I am aware, in business circles. But it is a great organized

attempt to roll back the torrent of pauperism in Great Britain : it is based on the principle laid down in 'Latter Day Pamphlets,' that the only charity likely to be effectual is that which prevents the cause, rather than tries to cure the effect ; and so it undertakes the rearing of a new generation of labourers, under such conditions as will make a labouring man's life at least as free from temptation to excess and sin as that of the upper classes. Says Mr. Ruskin :—" *To divert a little of the large current of English charity and justice from watching disease to guarding health, and from the punishment of crime to the reward of virtue ; to establish, here and there, exercise grounds instead of hospitals, and training schools instead of penitentiaries, is not, if you will slowly take it to heart, a frantic imagination.*"

For my own part, I cannot but think that the Guild is more certain of practical result than any of our schemes of poor relief ; but, as I have no intention of entering into any defence of the Guild, I must refer you for further information to the seven volumes of the 'Fors,' with the warning that, unless you are prepared to read right through them, you had better not touch them. No writer suffers so much as Mr. Ruskin from being read in extracts, and you simply cannot understand the 'Fors Clavigera' unless you can read the great purpose developing itself all through.

I spoke before of the nobleness of Mr. Ruskin's Art life. Although it is really a minor sacrifice, a statement of the money he has spent for the good of others may be more im-

pressive to the many. The Chair of Art at Oxford being incomplete without an attached system of technical education in Art, Mr. Ruskin, in 1875, gave £5,000 to found a Mastership of Drawing connected with the Chair. At the same time he gave £2,000 more for a collection of drawings to be placed in the Schools. By 1875, roughly estimating his remaining fortune then at £70,000, he had given the tithe of it, viz., £7,000, to the Guild. In the same year he gave over some property in London, worth £3,500, to be managed for the Guild by Miss Hill. All that is left now of his immense fortune—no less than £150,000 in cash, left him by his father, besides houses and pictures,—is £12,000, yielding him £360 a year; and on this he lives in the house he loved as a child—Brantwood, on Coniston Lake. Of the manner in which the rest of that great fortune has been spent it would be out of place for me to speak, but I can safely affirm that John Ruskin has faithfully and nobly acted as steward of the wealth given to him, as to all men, for his Master's service and honour. And that he has proved by stripping himself to the lowest sum on which he can live the life of an English gentleman, full of dignified repose and grave simplicity, and yet dispense the hospitality which Brantwood is never slow to offer.

Thus far I have told you what I could of the public life of John Ruskin, and shown you its entire consistency with his writings—the whole manifesting devotion to the common good as at once its key-note and its harmony. But I should

be doing him an injustice were I to let you believe that the truth or falseness of his teaching would be shown by the success or failure of the St. George's Guild. Understand that the Guild is only the immediate plan he proposes to meet the present distress, and to amend the condition of the agricultural labourer. In fact, we may well believe that it was started to meet the reproach so often levelled at reformers, that they are wholly destructive, and cannot suggest anything definite in place of what they destroy. To such objections the St. George's Guild is standing answer :— Here is what a land-owner may do, and ought to do ; and, as all cannot become land-owners, let those who trust me band themselves together, and become at once a protesting, and a land-owning Society.

But before the 'Fors Clavigera' was ever written Mr. Ruskin was already famous as a master of ethics ; and, even if the passages bearing directly on the Guild were left out, the 'Fors' would still be a treasure house of the thoughts of a great man—the more interesting as the letter mode of publication allowed him to speak of matters occurring in the world at the time, instead of dealing with principles in the abstract.

By that part of my subject then which deals with the Work of John Ruskin, I mean the ethical and practical teaching which underlies all he has written on art and economies, and is the groundwork out of which the Guild of St. George sprang.

And, as it is obviously impossible to give a complete system of morals in the few minutes during which I dare detain you further, I will merely touch on the most prominent, or least understood parts of his teaching—content if I can show you that, however strange such teaching may be at first hearing, it is that of a man who, as he himself claims, has never preached an “opinion,” but always the truths accredited by all the great thinkers of the past, and, in consequence, much more likely to be true than our “drifted, helpless, entangled weed of customary thought.”

First, then, Mr. Ruskin, viewing the hurrying life of busy England, with the unprejudiced eye of one whose knowledge of the past had made him well acquainted with what history has proved true or false in the life of nations, and whose work on Art had taught him man’s true province and essential greatness as lord of Nature, came long ago to the same conclusion as Carlyle, that the condition of England was indeed most unsatisfactory—even ominous. To walk through the crowded streets of a great city; to look on the pinched faces that tell of want, and the low brutal foreheads that tell of sin—to say nothing of that terrible weltering mass of human misery in court and alley, whose only wholesome food is the prison fare, whose only fresh air is breathed in the prison court,—was an acute pain to one who, living constantly with Nature, saw that every creature in her domain was happy in its short day of life, except man. And, looking at the grim division between the criminal and the educated

classes, the question of the *rightness* of all this would arise :—Are we so much separated from their crime but by the conventional rules we are ashamed to break ? Is the accident of birth a thing that we have reason to consider entirely providential—except to ourselves ? Whether providential or not, have we done our duty by these fallen classes ? Or are our little schemes of poor relief much more after all than sops to our conscience—mere plantings in the quicksand ? Have we not erected prisons to restrain the vice we have not tried to eradicate ; nay, hospitals to cure the diseases we have caused ? In short, is crime a part of the divine world-plan, or are we men responsible for it ?

And when the silence of his lonely hills was broken by the blast of quarrying, and the loveliest vales and rivers of smiling England were filled up and polluted by men who measured God's work by its price per square yard, the sensitive heart could not but cry out :—Are we to become the world's workshop at such a cost ? Are other nations to have their happy homesteads, and their peaceful life among the green fields, while we do the dirty work of the world, and soil our hearts and degrade our manhood to produce cloth a farthing a yard cheaper than our neighbours ?

Setting himself then to answer these questions, Mr. Ruskin soon came to the conclusion that the love of money was undoubtedly, now as always, the root of all the evil, but that, in this age, it had assumed a proportion and a hideousness which it never had before in any country. And

the first issue which would naturally present itself to an artist's eye was the desecration of natural beauty for purposes of private gain.

In effect, he says that, next to the bodies of its citizens, the most precious possessions of a State are its natural and distinctive features of scenery—its mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, trees and fields. Only in virtue of these, and of the memories which gather around them, is a nation patriotic. We, for example, are proud of our Scotch birth, not because we belong to this or that commercial centre, but because we are natives of the

*“Land of brown heath and shaggy wood,
Land of the mountain and the flood.”*

But what practically are we doing every day with our hills and streams? Instead of counting them as a sacred national charge, jealous over every encroachment or diminution of their beauty, we let any jolterhead who can scrape together a few pence buy the land and water, and do as he likes with them—turn them into an ash heap and a puddle if he pleases. For typical extract, take this :—* *“There was a rocky valley between Buxton and Bakewell, once upon a time, divine as the Vale of Tempe ; you might have seen the Gods there morning and evening—Apollo and all the sweet Muses of the Light—walking in fair procession on the lawns of it, and to and fro among the pinnacles of its crags. You cared*

* FORS I., 5, 10.

neither for Gods nor grass, but for cash (which you did not know the way to get); you thought you could get it by what the 'Times' calls 'Railroad Enterprise.' You Enterprised a Railroad through the valley—you blasted its rocks away, heaped thousands of tons of shale into its lovely stream. The valley is gone, and the Gods with it; and now, every fool in Buxton can be at Bakewell in half an hour, and every fool in Bakewell at Buxton; which you think a lucrative process of exchange—you Fools Everywhere."—The meaning of which passage is, that, in destroying a beautiful valley, no matter for what convenience and gain to the few, we are robbing the heritage of the poor—the heritage their Maker left them, of looking at His works at least, although they might never possess them.

To any thoughtful man the destruction of land and stream which goes on, quite uselessly except for private gain, is evident enough, and mournful enough; and with any one who has the soul to read Scott and Burns, I do not need to plead for the preservation of our streams and glens from the sacrilegious hands which would destroy them, and, with them, all possibility of Scottish song for ever after.

I know that what I am saying may excite a smile from too many. The grievance may seem more fanciful than real: it may be true enough, you will say, of town districts, but consider the vast stretches of country lying around, where no such abuse exists. But is the small extent of fresh country around our great cities not serious enough? For

those who can afford it, it is easy enough to fly from the smoke and the grime, and you will note as a significant fact that town residents find it necessary to do so over the week ends in summer time. But what of those whose life is one unending round of degrading labour? Have we a right, we may well enquire, to enjoy the pure air for ourselves, while we make pure air an impossible luxury for our poor neighbours? And is the extent of smoke-bound territory so small? East and west and north and south rise the flames of iron furnaces and the smoke of factories, and wherever they rise the fields around grow dark, and the streams grow foul. More and more does the city, with its sins and its sorrows, encroach on the country. A seam of coal is found in the loveliest part of a smiling pasture land. Down goes the shaft, and the heap of ashes begins to gather at the pit mouth. The railway is projected, tunnelling and blasting and polluting. Hordes of railway navvies, with all the vice and rudeness of the town, are let loose on the peaceful village. And all for what? Not that labour may be abundant, and the labourer live: not that the public interests demand it:—do not think so. Most of our railways are projected, not from any view to public interest, far less from philanthropic motives, but that a few capitalists may be made richer.

Mr. Ruskin's words are no more forcible than true when he says:—* “*The benevolence involved in the construction of*

* FORS. IV., 47, 261.

railways amounts exactly to this much and no more,—that if the British public were informed that engineers were now confident, after their practice in the Cenis and St. Gothard tunnels, that they could make a railway to Hell,—the British public would instantly invest in the concern to any amount ; and stop church-building all over the country, for fear of diminishing the dividends."

And all this is done by men who, honestly enough, consider the Heaven and Earth as God's first revelation to man : who complacently read, "Consider the lilies, how they grow," and are for ever taking away any possibility of our great city poor ever seeing any lilies to consider !

From nature Mr. Ruskin turned to our social system, and was not slow to find out the anomalies which most of us are aware of, but have not the courage to put so plainly into words. Briefly stated the position of society is this :—There are multitudes of labourers and workmen whose industry is dictated and guided, for good or evil, by a few rich men called capitalists and landowners ; and there is an immense class between the two which lives by exchanging commodities. This separation of destinies we who are not labourers, with admirable modesty, ascribe to Providence, tacitly assuming that the fact of a man's being born in a certain rank in life expresses God's opinion of it as the best possible place for him. And the present position of the land question is this, according to Mr. Ruskin,—that we generously lend the labourer our land, and generously lend

him tools, and we stand by with our hands in our pockets, while he digs. For this we allow him enough of the produce to keep him in life—barely enough sometimes ; and we pocket the rest as our right. What is the real meaning of all this ? Is it not an assumption on our part that God has been good enough to give money and land to us in virtue of which we make men our slaves, while we stand by and present a celestial appearance to them ? Now on what tenure is the land held ? “Some land has been bought ; some won by cultivation ; but the greater part, in Europe, seized originally by force of hand,” and actual possession, unquestioned during many generations, is the real tenure of most large landowners. Such a tenure will not long stand keen inspection ; and if the possession of land should ever be revised on principles of justice it will be seen that landholding is a trust given by the nation for the nation’s benefit ; that the only just claim which can now be made by any landowner is that he is worthy of the trust from the nation, and that he deserves it, not now by the right of fighting for it, but in virtue of a truer Captaincy—that of being first to share all dangers with his tenants, and first to lead all good work. In view of which wise Captaincy he will be indeed worthy to have such an income from the land as may keep him in all noble and beautiful life.

The modern landowner’s conception of himself is, I need not say, generally very different ; it is the altogether selfish

one, that the land exists for him, not he for the land, and that it is purely of grace or for gain that he allows anyone but himself to live on it—* *“For, during the last eight hundred years,”* says Ruskin, *“the upper classes of Europe have been one large Picnic Party. Most of them have been religious also ; and in sitting down, by companies, upon the green grass, in parks, gardens, and the like, have considered themselves commanded into that position by Divine authority, and fed with bread from Heaven : of which they duly considered it proper to bestow the fragments in support, and the tithes in tuition, of the poor.”*

All this, friends, must be changed. Such a conception of landowner's position was only possible when the classes who worked were uneducated, and accepted their own position without question. But with the march of Education comes inevitably the march of Reform, and Reform, if resisted, means Revolution. The workers are learning—already have learned—that while it is indeed necessary that there should be higher and lower classes, these must be determined by a standard of worth and work—not of birth alone : that, just as in old times, the strongest won the land by his lance and kept it because he was the best man, so now all artificial barriers must be removed, and the man who is altogether worthiest must be allowed to win when he can, and keep by such wisdom as he has. The cry has been—and

* FORS I., 2, 15.

rightly has been—Educate, Educate, but we must accept the consequences of education. We have raised an immense class to think, and we have given them the sharpest inducement to think by making their surroundings so altogether unbearable ; we have made the advantage of the rich over the poor the more conspicuous as we widened the gulf between the two. Do not think our social anomalies will long stand the fierce glare cast on them by emancipated minds. There is only one way to escape the fell torrent of revolution that will soon sweep from one end of Europe to the other, and that is—to lead it. The agitation in Ireland at the present time is only the beginning of the storm. The Irish people have caught at a part of a great truth, namely, that the land was meant for the many, not for the few. What the consequences of this half truth may be, unless the landowners have the courage to accept the situation and lead the reform, Heaven alone knows. The despair of a great people who imagine they are in the right is apt to take many a mad and bloody direction.

I have spoken mainly of the land interest, but similar thoughts suggest themselves as regards other interests. When the possession of land is questioned, the possession of capital may soon enough come under the same keen glance. And will it not be found that here the same truth holds,—that, in all rightness, those who have the wealth must hold it principally for the common good, and not for selfish purposes? Rightly understood, for example, nothing

would be esteemed more noble than the vocation of the merchant—to feed, clothe, and provide for the nation ; and when our merchants get into their heads the truth so well set forth in ‘Unto this Last,’ that, just as the duty of the soldier is to defend the nation, of the pastor to teach it, of the physician to keep it in health, and of the lawyer to dispense justice in it, so the first and most honourable duty of the merchant is to *provide* for the nation, we shall see such a beginning of national life as will make England once more the centre of the world.

But Mr. Ruskin for many years has seen what is the canker in our national history—namely, that we have no true patriotism. We are no longer a nation so much as an aggregate of individuals, seeking each one his own interests, and, generally, disregarding all others. We have forgotten that a nation’s first duty is to rear all its sons and daughters in healthy life, and to disregard or over-ride every private interest which interferes with that. And we have allowed the greed of gold to corrupt our national as well as our individual conscience. What can be thought of a nation’s honour when the first question in a European war is—“how will it affect the bondholders?” Is it not the case that year after year we have sunk millions in Turkish and Egyptian loans, fully conscious, if we cared to think, that the interest on these was squeezed out of an unhappy people by a rapacious government? Is it not notorious that in the last Cape War the savages were found armed with breechloaders

smuggled to them, against all law, by British merchants? Is it not the case that during the Indian Famine of 1876 enormous exports of corn were made from the very districts where the natives were dying in thousands? These are not exceptional cases; only more noticeable because on a larger scale, and on a national stage. They are the legitimate outcome of our commercial maxim—"buy in the cheapest market and sell in the dearest."

I venture to say that there is no more significant sign of the utter absence of the spirit of Christ from the business world than the fact, that such a maxim passes unchallenged as a standard law of business morality. For what does it mean? Let me put it in Mr. Ruskin's own words:—

* "*Suppose three sailors cast away on an uninhabited coast, and obliged to maintain themselves there by their own labour for a series of years. Suppose two of them separate to farm different pieces of land at some distance from each other along the coast; each estate furnishing a distinct kind of produce, and each more or less in need of the material raised on the other. Suppose that the third man, in order to save the time of all three, undertakes simply to superintend the transference of commodities from one farm to the other; on condition of receiving some sufficiently remunerative share of every parcel of goods conveyed, or of some other parcel received in exchange for it. If this carrier or messenger always brings to each estate, from the*

* UNTO THIS LAST, 49 & 55.

other, what is chiefly wanted, at the right time, the operations of the two farmers will go on prosperously, and the largest possible result in produce, or wealth, will be attained by the little community. But suppose no intercourse between the land-owners is possible, except through the travelling agent; and that, after a time, this agent, watching the course of each man's agriculture, keeps back the articles with which he has been entrusted until there comes a period of extreme necessity for them, on one side or other, and then exacts in exchange for them all that the distressed farmer can spare of other kinds of produce; it is easy to see that by ingeniously watching his opportunities, he might possess himself regularly of the greater part of the superfluous produce of the two estates, and at last, in some year of severest trial or scarcity, purchase both for himself, and maintain the former proprietors thenceforward as his labourers or servants. This would be a case of commercial wealth acquired on the exactest principles of modern political economy."

The truth of all this, in simple case, is self-evident, and to see that it applies in the complex operations of modern commerce only requires conscientious thinking. And, if you carry out the principle of true commerce further, you will find that the manufacturer exists for the sake of the workmen employed by him, and is responsible to a considerable extent for the bodies and souls of his employes as well as for the fabric they produce. You will find that the merchant exists that he may exchange articles in such a way as to benefit both him who buys and him who sells. But if we were

to imagine it possible that our physician might carry out *his* profession on commercial principles ; might first of all make us ill that he might be called in, and then keep us ill that he might get paid for attendance, we should find out the fallacy of our commerce sooner. Undoubtedly Mr. Ruskin is right when he says that the learned professions and the army have been esteemed so much more honourable than the mercantile, because they are presumed to be mainly unselfish, holding their life and work for the common good, while the present principle of commerce is supposed, and rightly supposed, to be in the main a selfish one.

But Mr. Ruskin was not content with exposing the degradation of our ideas in regard to commerce ; was not content even in pointing the remedy ; but he searched into the causes of this wide-spread contagion of sordidness, with a very curious result. The greed of gold had, presumably, been as strong in other nations of the past, and the fearful want of appreciation of their responsibility on the part of the wealthy had had a parallel in other times ; but never with such wide-spread and disastrous results. Mr. Ruskin found the explanation in that which is almost the foundation of all modern commerce—the taking of usury or interest for the use of money.

Bear with me if I venture, in the face of almost certain incredulity on your part, to lay before you in a few sentences the good reasons he has for this belief. And that you may not be hardened into indifference by so many hard sayings about

our modern life put into one short address, I may say that Mr. Ruskin himself sees that our commercial pursuits are so entirely rooted in this wrong principle that the present conditions of life must all suffer an immense reform, before a change can be made in this : only he says of it as of all his teaching ;—" I tell you what is truth, and I have nothing in the world to do with whether it is practicable at present or not."

His reasons against usury then are these. First,—It is absolutely forbidden in the Word of God. All the Levitical law is against it ; the prophets repeatedly denounce it ; and the Fifteenth Psalm—" Lord, who shall abide in Thy Tabernacle? . . . the man that putteth not his coin to usury," is quite sufficient proof for any one who wishes it. The strongest passage against it in the New Testament, in the Parable of the Talents, has by a curious misreading been repeatedly quoted in its favour, whereas the very conception of God as an 'hard man' shows the text clearly to mean—" You call me an hard man ; if I had been so I would not have scrupled to take usury, that simplest way of gathering where I had not strawed ; so you are without excuse.' We might as well imagine that our Lord, in the similar parable, meant to represent Himself as the Unjust Judge who feared not God neither regarded man, as imagine that He meant to represent Himself here as an hard man who commended usury." Second,—It taxes the labour of those to whom the loan is made : to make a profit, as

well as pay the interest, they must work harder and longer than the possessor of the capital, who has only to work for his profit. The attempt to evade this law is the explanation of shoddy manufactures. Third,—It is a means of making money without work and without responsibility, whereas no man, in the true conception of things, has a right to cause or command labour of which he cannot know the justness, alike in the course of the work and in its consequence. The principle is seen at its height when the nation flings its money rapturously into a five per cent. loan to some people whose whole career is in contradiction to all we hope for from our truly enlightened civilization. Fourth,—Every great statesman of the past has denounced it, and we are not yet wise enough to despise the wisdom of our fathers. Fifth,—Great commerce has been, and great commercial nations have flourished, where usury was unknown, or the practice of it branded with disgrace.

I leave this point now without further defence. I know that our commercial world is not yet capable of forming an impartial opinion where its interests are so much involved : and I have done as much as I could hope for, if I unsettle your minds on the unquestioned rightness of interest—of which I daresay you before have had no doubt, and if what I have said may lead you at least to doubt whether it is altogether Christian to lend a poor relation a few pounds, and charge him five per cent. for it.

For men do not exist primarily to buy and sell, but to do justly and to love mercy. It is a very small matter whether

by our trade we become poor or rich, but it is a very great matter as regards ourselves before God that no human being should be hurt or destroyed by what we make the business of our lives.

There is one other point which I must take up, not that it is perhaps the most important, but that it is the least understood—it is Mr. Ruskin's teaching on machinery. I often hear it said "Ruskin objects to steam and machinery;" and this is generally enough to condemn Mr. Ruskin for ever in the mind of a man of the world. But this is not altogether true. You will find in Mr. Ruskin's works some very gigantic proposals of tidal and water-driven machinery. But he certainly objects, and in the strongest manner, to the abuse of machinery. To do by machine without thought what might be as well done by hand seems a foolish and a simple thing to him. For instance: he objects to a steam reaping machine, while willing reapers, who would have had the healthy discipline of honest labour, are sent starving about the country; idleness producing *its* crop certain enough without steam power, and for net result such a harvest of vice and wretchedness as we have to spend millions yearly to gather into jails and poorhouses.

His own words give the gist of the matter :—* "*Observe. A man and a woman, with their children, properly trained, are able easily to cultivate as much ground as will feed them ;*

* FORS I., 5, 10.

to build as much wall and roof as will lodge them, and to weave as much cloth as will clothe them. They can all be perfectly happy and healthy in doing this. Supposing that they invent machinery that will build, plough, thresh, cook, and weave, and that they have none of these things any more to do, but may read, or play croquet, or cricket, all day long, I believe myself that they will neither be so good nor so happy as without the machines. But I waive my belief in this matter for the time. I will assume that they become more refined and moral persons, and that idleness is in future to be the mother of all good. But observe, I repeat, the power of your machine is only in enabling them to be idle. It will not enable them to live better than they did before, nor to live in greater numbers. Get your heads quite clear on this matter. Out of so much ground only so much living is to be got, with or without machinery. You may set a million of steam ploughs to work on an acre, if you like—out of that acre only a given number of grains of corn will grow, scratch or scorch it as you will. So that the question is not at all whether, by having more machines, more of you can live. No machines will increase the possibilities of life. They only increase the possibilities of idleness. Suppose, for instance, you could get the oxen in your plough driven by a goblin, who would ask for no pay, not even a cream-bowl,—(you have nearly managed to get it driven by an iron goblin, as it is ;)—Well, your furrow will take no more seeds than if you had held the stilts yourself. But, instead of holding them, you sit, I presume, on a bank beside the

field, under an eglantine ;—watch the goblin at his work, and read poetry. Meantime, your wife in the house has also got a goblin to weave and wash for her. And she is lying on the sofa reading poetry.

“ Now, as I said, I don't believe you would be happier so, but I am willing to believe it ; only since you are already such brave mechanists, show me at least one or two places where you are happier. Let me see one small example of approach to this seraphic condition. I can show you examples, millions of them, of happy people, made happy by their own industry. Farm after farm I can show you, in Bavaria, Switzerland, the Tyrol, and such other places, where men and women are perfectly happy and good, without any iron servants. Show me, therefore, some English family, with its fiery familiar, happier than these. Or bring me,—for I am not inconvincible by any kind of evidence,—bring me an evidence of an English family or two to their increased felicity. Or if you cannot do so much as that, can you convince even themselves of it ? They are perhaps happy, if only they knew how happy they were : Virgil thought so, long ago, of simple rustics ; but you hear at present your steam-propelled rustics are crying out that they are anything else than happy, and that they regard their boasted progress ‘ in the light of a monstrous Sham.’ ”

Generally speaking Mr. Ruskin objects to the labour of any man being turned into a mechanical exercise, instead of the healthful play of brain and sinew ; knowing that, while labour is indeed cursed, it is divinely redeemed

from the curse in the true pleasure which the workman has in putting heart and taste and character into his work. It is the great distinction between the mechanical and the artistic. An artist,—a creator, is the highest type of man in work : the man who turns the handle of a machine which turns out the entire finished article, perhaps the lowest ; but between these there are all grades of work, and in proportion as you rise to the artist, as in all fine handwork, or sink to the mechanic, as in self-acting machine work, do you raise or lower man. Mr. Ruskin believes that the strong tendency of trade at present is to supplant man by machinery, or to subordinate man to machinery : in the one case you make England a machine shop instead of a happy country ; in the other you make men the slaves of thankless, heartless toil.

The answer may be made, as I have heard it :—But machinery must supplant hard labour unless you put a limit to the discovery and perfecting of machinery, and what justification can be offered for restraining mechanical ingenuity and inventiveness ? To which I have little doubt Mr. Ruskin would merely reply :—If the few should happen to be spending their lives in inventing machines for the many to kill themselves with, the sooner you put an end to such beneficent invention the better.

Consider what the apotheosis of all our modern trade would be. Our country would become all riddled with coalpits and mines, and the bank of dross would become the

prominent feature in *all* landscapes as it is now around this city. Our hills would be blasted and torn for minerals—the veins of ore within being counted more gracious than the red heather without. Our rivers would become slimy canals, smoking with the drains and refuse of innumerable mills. Everywhere convenient would stand a five-storey factory filled with machines, at which a dull workman, or, better, a worn-out woman—she would work cheaper—would stand listlessly, perhaps turning a crank every hour or so,—the machine meantime running on from hour to hour with the minimum of attention. The men and women of this commercial Paradise would live always within shadow of their workplace, and would be content with the very smallest wages possible to keep life in. Of course the men would not be able to afford the luxury of marriage, so there might be some scarcity of workers in the next generation, but that would only be providential, as machinery would have made man quite a useless and expensive article. The condition of the millowners might not be quite so satisfactory as one would expect. In such a celestial state of things they ought to have been very wealthy, and lived in fine country seats away from their work people; but, unfortunately, the country would then be only a memory, thanks to coal-pits, mines, and mills, and there would be neither salmon fishing nor grouse shooting. And besides, on the ‘cheapest market’ principle, the wealth would be mostly in the hands of the exchangers, called merchants,

and the poor millowners would be finding out the beneficent results of the usury system by having money lent them, instead of lending it. If, however, the love of something beautiful should still exist, it would be very easy to adopt Mr. Ruskin's suggestion, and raise a new platform on iron scaffolding above this ; and by pulverizing the mountains, and strewing the duly pulverized and, by wise medical geology, drugged materials, over the upper stages, to obtain quite a creditable stretch of green fields above. These however would be duly monopolized by the rich, and our present ingenious manufactures would be carried on by the poor in the dark lower storeys. For this apotheosis, when it is accomplished, and when you get all you are striving to attain, as Ruskin says, may the Lord make you truly thankful !

I know it will immediately be said :—" This is begging the whole question : what is the use of arguing on an extravagantly imagined abuse of anything ?" But is this apotheosis so extravagant ? Is it not already sufficiently realized in the life of the great working population of towns like Wigan or St. Helens ?

What, then, is the practical issue of all Mr. Ruskin's teaching ? You may be ready enough to grant the wrongness of things as they are, and you may also grant that Mr. Ruskin's views are right in theory at least. But you will say—" Is it possible under present conditions to do otherwise than our neighbours ?"

My friends, we have to blame such an argument, thoughtlessly and so far criminally adduced, as the cause of almost all the mischief that is.—* “*You have thought things would right themselves,*” says Ruskin, “*or that it was God’s business to right them, not yours. Peremptorily, it is yours. Not, observe, to get your rights, but to put things to rights. Some eleven in the dozen of the population of the world are occupied earnestly in putting things to wrongs, thinking to benefit themselves thereby. Is it any wonder, then, you are uncomfortable, when already the world, in our part of it, is over-populated, and eleven in the dozen of the over-population doing diligently wrong, and the remaining dozenth expecting God to do their work for them?*”

A beginning of reform must be made; and it must be made by the upper classes, or the march of reform will soon leave no upper classes to do anything. Sacrifice there must be, but the time is yet far distant when any great good can be done without sacrifice; and, when it does come, virtue will have lost what makes it virtue—the glory of being its own reward. In one thing we can all follow Mr. Ruskin—in resolute protest against all we know to be evil, and in unselfish devotion of our lives to rectify all we know to be unjust.

I have spoken of Mr. Ruskin, his life, and his work, and have tried to crowd into one short hour what I have been

* FORS II., 17 1.

years of learning. In attempting a general survey I have been forced to do injustice to all the topics I have touched—to give conclusions without adequate statement of the premises. Do not, I beg of you, take my words as anything but the barest shadow of a shadow of all he has taught. I feel overpowered and helpless when I think of how little I have told you of that vast store-house of far-reaching wisdom, and how faint has been my echo of his wonderful words. Of himself I beg you to listen : to read before you criticize : above all, to understand before you condemn ; and, incredulous as you may be now, you will end, I am confident, in saying with me that, of all men in this century, the spirit of Him who went about continually doing good breathes through the entire Life and Work of John Ruskin.



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A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

Why should I wish to see God better than this day?
I see something of God each hour of the twenty-four, and each
moment then,
In the faces of men and women I see God, and in my own face in
the glass,
I find letters from God dropt in the street, and every one is signed
by God's name,
And I leave them where they are, for I know that wheresoe'er I go,
Others will punctually come for ever and ever.

WALT WHITMAN.

A DISCIPLE OF PLATO

A CRITICAL STUDY

OF

JOHN RUSKIN

BY

WILLIAM SMART, M.A.

With a Note by Mr. Ruskin.



GLASGOW

WILSON & McCORMICK, SAINT VINCENT STREET

1883

A DISCIPLE OF PLATO.

“Be sure, if the author is worth anything, that you will not get at his meaning all at once;—nay, that at his whole meaning you will not for a long time arrive in any wise. Not that he does not say what he means, and in strong words too; but he cannot say it all; and what is more strange, *will* not, but in a hidden way and in parables, in order that he may be sure you want it.”*

With these words of his own before me it may seem misdirected energy to attempt, as I have done in the following paper, to find out the central and essential teaching of John Ruskin. My excuse is that such an attempt seemed necessary in view of the great ignorance and misunderstanding that prevails as to what Ruskin really has taught.

“Read his ‘*Munera Pulveris*,’ ‘*Oxford Lectures on Art*,’ and whatever else he is now writing if you can manage to get them—which is difficult here owing to the ways he has towards the bibliopolic world,” wrote Carlyle to Emerson: and although Ruskin is the most candid of writers, these “ways” explain much

* *Sesame and Lilies*, i., 13.

of the general ignorance regarding his writings. "He is the founder of some sort of Socialistic scheme," says a common report, and the mere mention of Socialism explains much of the misunderstanding.

Hence one who knows his writings, and knows also how much nonsense is talked about them by critics who have not troubled themselves to ascertain his *standpoint*, is constantly reminded of a very old text, "The Letter killeth but the Spirit giveth life." It happens continually that those who respect him as an art critic have no interest in his social teachings, while those who agree with him in his social views have no interest in his art work. Yet his teachings in both departments have been entirely homogeneous. If he says that there is no "wealth" but Life, he also says that greatness in Art is measured by the moral life of the workman. Let it be remembered that Ruskin's work in life has been Art Criticism; that he is now for the second time Slade Professor in Oxford; and yet that those who know him best consider him above all great as a preacher of life and conduct: and one may see that it is not unreasonable to ask, in the case of his writings, where the Letter reveals the Spirit, and where it hinders it?

That the spirit of a great man's teaching is not on the surface, is in fact generally mistaken by his own generation, is evident from this, that almost all great thinkers have had schools of disciples, who became in great measure rivals, even enemies of each other. We all know how variously the words of Christ himself have been interpreted, from the schisms that split the Church.

into east and west, down to the latest divide of sectarianism. In philosophy the last great name, Hegel, is acknowledged as master by the rising school of Christian philosophy in this country, and by the extreme left of Nihilism in Germany. While for Ruskin at the present day all faiths are claimed, from the reddest Communism to the rankest Toryism.

And necessarily so. It is not so much that one school follows the Letter, and another the Spirit—the two are not always so distinct as make that possible; but that all great men are many-sided; are, in fact, at once broad and narrow. It is the penalty of greatness that disciples are sure to carry out one of the sides to the neglect of the others. And yet the search for truth is not to be thought a game of compromises. When one side of a thought or theory has been stated by one man, and the other side by another, you cannot always find the truth by splitting the difference. Truth lies not in any division, nor between the two, but is always the living union of sides which, in isolation, are contradictory. It is a well defined law of thought and progress, that when one aspect of truth is pushed too far, it shows its unreality by swinging round into its opposite. And the perpetual tendency of all great thinking, especially such thinking as makes for practical reform, is to accentuate unduly some one side, and push it to extremes. The very violence of such extreme draws attention to its falsity in that form, and brings out the championship of the other side; indeed, in a very great man, leads to reaction and self-contradiction. Hence the assumption that self-contradiction is the mark

of weakness or falsity is not always well-grounded. The consistent man is the narrow man, for he has to limit his sphere of vision to one side of every question. It is true that the great deeds of history have been done by men who fixed their eyes steadily on one thing, and refused to look beside or beyond it ; but they did so at the cost of having their work revised in another generation. The difference between a great thinker and a great reformer generally is, that the work of the former lies in finding out the contradictions and trying to reconcile them, while the latter passes by the unsolved contradiction, and unhesitatingly takes one side.

This law is seen both in individual systems and in historical evolutions. It explains how we find such a transcendent genius as Plato contradicting himself at various stages of his advance, and, as a whole, calling up the counterpart in Aristotle. In the same way Mill's *Economy* brings out what we might call the Polity of Ruskin. And it is worth noting that we find the profoundest example of this law in such a thorough-going contradiction as the two statements :—"He that is not for me is against me," and "He that is not against us is on our side."

On this account it seems to me that all great teachers, as certainly all great philosophers, must be studied historically. In themselves they are always either the counterpart or the summing up of thinkers that have preceded them, and in the course of their own writings they generally exhibit the opposition of thought I have mentioned.

Or, putting the matter in another aspect, might one not say

that the Genius and the Reformer come into collision in a great man. As a genius, he touches the world on many sides, all finding voice in him : like a finely strung instrument he vibrates to every impulse that comes from the heart of nature and of man. But by reason of this very sympathy the overwhelming sadness of human life touches him as it does not touch others. His nearness to God makes him more tenderly human, and in the end the intellect is overborne by the heart : he is forced to desert his own quiet work and rush into the arena of reform, and too often he blunts his weapons and saddens his life, in not recognizing that human misery is as old as the world, and is a problem for the gods to solve.

Indeed it is not given to any man to be alike great in all departments. Greatness comes very much of knowing what one is best fitted for, and recognizing the necessary limitations of life and strength. But few have the patience and the courage to pursue one work steadily, and let the innumerable cries of help from other fields fall upon deaf ears. The great man must, because he is human, essay upon fields which ordinary men know better, and his failures in this so-called practical sphere form favourite texts for the great army of small men to declaim—"See what a miserably ordinary mortal your hero is!" Equality has always been a favourite doctrine of those who would attain it by leveling down, not by levelling up—of which there is no better proof than the satisfaction with which the public have settled down to the opinion, that the key to Carlyle's philosophy was his Dyspepsia. The world takes very long to learn the double mean-

ing of that homely truth ;—" A man's a man for a' that " : to judge a man not by his failures but by his work, remembering, when all is said, that the distinction of Man is, not only that he is not a Beast, but that he is not a God.

These then are some of the difficulties that come up when we would try to get at the spirit of a man whose name has been one of the most famous in letters for nearly fifty years, and whose teachings are neither unknown nor yet much understood.

They can only be met, as I have indicated, by something like a historical survey of his literary life. And, first, one might enquire what were the chief sources of his inspiration. Who is the master whose teaching has principally moulded his thought? "It is always the first sign of a dominant and splendid intellect, that it knows of whom to learn."* Ruskin, we may be assured, is no Paracelsus. If he has anything worth telling it did not come by mere intuition, but is a superstructure on foundations laid by the mighty thinkers of the past. There is no royal road, as he has said, to any place worth going to. Intuition has its place, but that place is, not to supplant the accumulated wealth of past thought, but to interpret it. To trust *only* to the divine vision is to be deceived by the false fire.

The world, indeed, seldom realizes how much it owes to previous thinkers, and how thought, like history, repeats itself. Speaking generally, one need not be astonished to find modern

* The Art of England, i., 6.

systems of thought grounded in the writings of the great Greeks. Do we not, for instance, find the central thought of Darwinism, the containing of every lower species by the genus above it, from the simplest atom to the completed organism, in Aristotle—except that Aristotle carried up every species to its completion in God? And is not the whole idea of Carlyle's Clothes' philosophy to be found in the following passage from the *Gorgias* :—

“In the days of Cronos there existed a law respecting the destiny of man, which has always been, and still continues to be, in Heaven,—that he who has lived all his life in justice and holiness, shall go, when he dies, to the Islands of the Blessed, and dwell there in perfect happiness out of the reach of evil; but that he who has lived unjustly and impiously shall go to the house of vengeance and punishment, which is called Tartarus. And in the time of Cronos, and even later in the reign of Zeus, the judgment was given on the very day on which the men were to die; the judges were alive, and the men were alive; and the consequence was that the judgments were not well given. Then Pluto and the authorities from the Islands of the Blessed came to Zeus and said that the souls found their way to the wrong places. Zeus said: ‘I shall put a stop to this; the judgments are not well given, and the reason is that the judged have their clothes on, for they are alive; and there are many having evil souls who are apparelled in fair bodies, or wrapt in wealth or rank, and when the day of judgment arrives many witnesses come forward and witness on their behalf that they have lived righteously. The judges are awed by them, and they themselves too have their

clothes on when judging ; their eyes and ears and their whole bodies are interposed as a veil before their own souls. All this is a hindrance to them ; there are the clothes of the judges and the clothes of the judged.—What is to be done ? I will tell you :— In the first place, I will deprive men of the foreknowledge of death, which they at present possess ; that is a commission of which I have already entrusted the execution to Prometheus : in the second place, they shall be entirely stripped before they are judged, for they shall be judged when they are dead ; and the judge too shall be naked, that is to say, dead : he with his naked soul shall pierce into the other naked soul, and they shall die suddenly and be deprived of all their kindred, and leave their brave attire strewn upon the earth ; conducted in this manner the judgment will be just.’”*

I think I am not far wrong in saying that one at least of Ruskin’s masters is Plato. To what extent this following of Plato is conscious and intentional, and to what extent it came to him *through* general culture, it would not be easy to say. “Out of Plato came all things that are still written and debated among men of thought. Great havoc makes he among our originalities. In proportion to the culture of men they become his scholars, making it impossible to think, on certain levels, except through him,” said Emerson.

But I do not mean that isolated thoughts only are to be found

* *Gorgias*, 523.

similar in both. I mean that Ruskin has adopted, *in toto*, some of the great Platonic conceptions as they stand in the Republic and the Laws, and has worked them out under the new conditions of modern life and society.

Perhaps it may not be out of place to remind even cultured readers that the "Republic" of Plato is the ideal reconstruction of a Greek State, on the basis of the Platonic conception of Justice. It is the longest of the Dialogues with the exception of the Laws, being in ten books of about an hour's reading each. It begins by discussing the current theories of Justice, dismissing them in turn, till the true conception is formulated something like this :—Justice is, from the side of society, the assigning to each man his due place in the social system ; and from the side of the citizen, his keeping that place, fulfilling his duties in it, and respecting the place of every other. Starting from this as his principle Plato constructs his ideal State, entering minutely into the education and surrounding of the citizen,—especially as regards Art and Religion ; and the true theory of government as contrasted with the various systems which had had ample experiment in the stormy life of Greece : in short, the meaning and end of a State, and the methods by which such end is to be obtained.

The "Laws" of Plato, on the other hand, was written much later, and, from a literary point of view, bears much the same relation to the "Republic" as "Paradise Regained" to "Paradise Lost." It is inferior in every way but one, and is evidently the work of a man who saw that the City of God he had dreamed of in his youth was not to be founded in his

day, nor much approach made to it; and who had concluded that the best thing he could do was to draw out such counsels as could be carried into practice in any reasonable scheme of colonization or emigration.

In this, it is worth noting, it has no small resemblance to Ruskin's own procedure in writing the "*Fors Clavigera*." At a time when most men would think their work well over (being nearly sixty years old), Ruskin was not content to have written of Art as no man had ever written before him, but began the "*Fors*" thus:—

"I cannot paint, nor read, nor look at minerals, nor do anything else that I like, and the very light of the morning sky has become hateful to me, because of the misery that I know of, and see signs of, where I know it not, which no imagination can interpret too bitterly. Therefore, I will endure it no longer quietly; but henceforward, with any few or many who will help, do my poor best to abate this misery."*

The fundamental idea then, as I have said, of the "*Republic*," and, in a lesser degree, of the "*Laws*," is Justice. It is the end of statesmanship that each man should be put in the place for which he is best fitted, and, once placed, should be kept there for life. The citizen's method of living was not to be an individual choice, or a matter of competition, but a thing for the State to decide. That the governed classes would find their truest happiness thus he was confident. What more should a man want than to fill the place Heaven had destined for him? As for the govern-

* *Fors*, i., 3.

ing classes, to the objection that theirs would be a life of severe work, he simply answered :—

“ Even if so, there would not be anything wonderful in their still being the happiest of men ; but let that pass, for our object in the construction of the State is the greatest happiness of the whole, and not that of any one class ; and in a State which is ordered with a view to the good of the whole, we think we are most likely to find Justice.”*

In short, that “ No man liveth to himself,” was to Plato not a mere theory, but the very spirit of law and justice.

It needs no genius to see that where citizens are but men, this rigid justice could only be carried out by the strong hand ; and therefore we find the Republic resolve itself into an Aristocracy, a government of the *ἀριστοι*, the best men. To find these best men was the problem ; which solved, the rest would be easy.

In this general view of the end and method of statesmanship, Ruskin seems to me entirely to agree. The key to all the strangeness of his social views lies in this, that he considers the healthy and happy life of *all* the citizens the sole end of legislation, and a tyranny of the wisest its method. *Laissez Faire* has no place in the ideal state of either Plato or Ruskin. The greatest achievements of commerce, the hugest expansion of national wealth, the proudest stretching of empire is nothing, if any large proportion of the citizens are herded together in squalor and wretchedness.

* Republic, iv., 420.

This being the key to both systems I shall return to it later, and, meanwhile, I must point out that, not merely in general plan, but in matters of practical detail, Ruskin has taken Plato for his master.

Such ideas as the following are conspicuous in both :— that Education is a matter for the whole life and not for youth only : that one of its necessary conditions consists in surrounding the youth with fair sights and beautiful sounds : that Poetry and Art should be regulated to serve certain ethical ends and not be left to individual caprice, any more than the providing for the nation should be left to unlimited competition : that the consummation of Education should be to make, and of Art, to pourtray the beautiful soul harmonizing with the beautiful body : that Reverence and Obedience are virtues of all noble life : that the good man is a willing servant, and only the meaner sort of man independent and fearless : that severe restrictions should be placed on private fortunes—"the citizen must be happy and good," says Plato, "but very rich and very good at the same time he cannot be" : that every man should practise one thing only, that being the thing to which his nature is most perfectly adapted, and that the ambition which makes a man want to be better off than nature intended him to be is the "ruin of the State." Then we have the entire prohibition of Usury, of Credit, of two prices in trading, and of immoderate competition generally.

Lastly, there is repeated reference in both writers to the sphere of opinion as compared with that of exact thought. In Ruskin

these are very striking. Witness that passage in "Sesame and Lilies" ending: "A very little honest study will enable you to perceive that what you took for your own 'judgment' was mere chance prejudice, and drifted, helpless, entangled weed of castaway thought; nay, you will see that most men's minds are indeed little better than rough heath wilderness, neglected and stubborn, partly barren, partly overgrown with pestilent brakes, and venomous wind sown herbage of evil surmise."* Or the fiery answer to the question: "must I not act according to the dictates of my conscience?"—"By no means, my conscientious friend, unless you are quite sure that yours is not the conscience of an ass."†

In Plato the place of subjective opinion is as clear:—"Do you not know, I said, that all mere opinions are *bad*, and the best of them blind";—and forms in fact one of the best known characteristics of the Platonic philosophy.

Here are two striking passages on Retail Trading, which show how clearly both writers witness that reform in all things must be led by the upper classes. The first is from the "Laws":—"The mass of mankind do not observe moderation, and when they might gain in moderation they prefer gains without limit; wherefore all that relates to retail trade and merchandise, and keeping of taverns, is denounced and numbered among dishonourable things. Now that a man goes to desert places and builds houses which can only be reached by long journeys, for the sake of retail trade, and receives strangers who are in need at the desired resting places, and gives them peace and calm when they are

* *Sesame and Lilies*, i., 26.

† *Fors*, liv.

tossed by the storm, or cool shade in the heat ; and then, instead of behaving to them as friends, and showing the duties of hospitality to his guests, treats them as enemies and captives who are at his mercy, and will not release them till they have paid the highest, most abominable, and dishonest price ;—these are the sort of practices—and foul evils they are—which cast a reproach upon the succour of adversity. For if (what I trust may never be, and will not be) we were to compel, if I may venture to say a ridiculous thing, the best men everywhere to keep taverns for a time, or carry on retail trade, or do anything of that sort ; or if, in consequence of some dire necessity, the best women were compelled to follow a similar calling, then we should know how agreeable and pleasant all these things are ; and all such occupations, if they were carried on as according to pure reason, would be honoured as we honour a mother or a nurse.” *

Compare with this Ruskin's words : “ If we duly recognise the laws of God about meats and drinks, there will for every labourer and traveller, be such chancing upon meat and drink and other entertainment as shall be sacredly pleasant to him. And there cannot indeed be at present imagined a more sacred function for young Christian men than that of hosts or hospitallers, supplying, to due needs, and with proper maintenance of their own lives, wholesome food and drink to all men : so that as, at least, always at one end of a village there may be a holy church and vicar, so at the other end of the village there may be a holy tavern and

* Laws, xi., 918.

tapster ministering the good creatures of God, so that they may be sanctified by the Word of God and His Providence." *

What at once strikes one on reading the "Republic" is the question, whether Plato was in earnest in representing such a state as practicable. It is the same question one feels inclined to ask of Ruskin. Did Plato think that a system of government running counter to all the individual interests of men, and founded on a purely ethical principle, would be entertained, and even if entertained, would last?

We may be quite sure that Plato met very much the same ridicule and indifference from the practical people of Athens, as Ruskin does from the business men of our day. The region of pure thought has in all ages been an ether that the average man finds too rare for comfort. Since the Christian era he has indeed a religion which lifts him above the sordid interests of life, and assures him that the Life is more than meat. But it may be questioned how much such a religion is really believed in, when we find how little thought is given to any higher ideal of life than the mere money-making one. That the whole conduct of man's life should be a religion, and rounded by conformity to a spiritual law within him, of this he has no idea; and so he puts the best energies of his being into concerns that are individual and selfish.

Let it at once be confessed that Philosophy and Practical Politics occupy different spheres. In this way Plato answers: "Oh, my friends, do not suppose me ignorant that there is a certain

* Fors, xxxvi., 5.

degree of truth in your objections; but I am of opinion that, in matters which are not present but future, he who exhibits a pattern of that at which he aims, should in nothing fall short of the fairest and truest." * In other words, "the State must follow and not lead the character and progress of the citizen." And, even if the Republic were confessed to be for ever outside the reach of practical politics, it might well be that, as Plato says, "In Heaven there is laid up a pattern of it, methinks, which he who desires may behold, and beholding, may set his own house in order." †

But, apart from this, it might be answered that Plato's communism was more possible than Ruskin's, inasmuch as the Greek States were small, perfectly organic, and therefore easily moved by any great reformer or leader.

Be this as it may, the interesting point for us is, that the solution of the problem in both cases is looked for *in the same direction*.

"What is the least change," asked Plato, "which will enable a State to pass into the truer form? Just this one change, which is not a slight or easy, though still a possible one. Attend to me. Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one, and those commoner natures who follow either to the exclusion of the other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never cease from ill—no, nor the human race, as I believe—and then only will our State have a possibility of life and behold the light of day." ‡

* Laws, v., 746. † Republic, ix., 592. ‡ Republic, v., 473.

Who does not remember Carlyle's Fortieth Article which includes all the other Thirty-Nine;—"Human Intellect, if you consider it well, is the exact summary of Human *Worth*; and the essence of all worth-ships and worships is reverence for that same. True it for ever remains that Intellect is the real object of reverence, and of devout prayer, and zealous wish and pursuit, among the sons of men; and even, well understood, the one object. It is the Inspiration of the Almighty that giveth men understanding. For it must be repeated, and ever again repeated till poor mortals get to discern it, and awake from their baleful paralysis and degradation under foul enchantments, that a man of intellect, of real and not sham Intellect, is by the nature of him likewise inevitably a man of nobleness, a man of courage, rectitude, pious strength; who, even *because* he is and has been loyal to the Laws of this Universe, is initiated into *discernment* of the same; to this hour a Missioned of Heaven; whom if men follow, it will be well with them; whom, if men do not follow, it will not be well."*

In the same way Ruskin takes up and expounds over and over again this Gospel of Might:—"Nature and heaven command you, at your peril, to discern worth from unworth in everything, and most of all in man. Your main problem is that ancient and trite one: 'Who is best man?' and the Fates forgive much,—forgive the wildest, fiercest, cruellest experiments—if fairly made for the determination of that."†

* Latter Day Pamphlets, iii.

† Fors, xiv., 7.

Now here we have the central idea of statesmanship stated according to three greatest writers. Is there any recognition of this "question of questions" in modern statescraft? Is it true that what we call Conservatism has for its end to find out the best men, and put itself under their leading; or that what we call Radicalism would wrest the power from the few great to bestow it on the many little? The one answer is as true as the other. You cannot find out any great conscious tendency in a political party, so long as wise men and fools are not banded on separate sides. Unlike the Greeks, we work towards our ends slowly, almost unconsciously. But as the world is yet governed by Reason, we work towards the same ends. The Spirit of an Age is in fact greater than it knows. A nation seldom acts consciously on any principle; and assuredly its spirit does not reside exclusively in any of the political parties which are its instruments. Who doubts that the spirit of this age is Democracy? Not Democracy as some would interpret it,—Mob Law; but Democracy as the great seers have seen it,—the development of the Reformation principle, the right of Reason alone to rule; the union of men as free intelligences, governing themselves in the new power of self-government that comes to a nation when all its citizens *think*. "All Democracy lies in this," as Carlyle says, "not that the noble soul, born poor, should be set to spout in Parliament, but that he should be set to assist in governing men." For what is the first thing that men do when they come to their senses, but follow that clearest dictate of reason—put themselves under the leadership of the Fittest?

Not of the wealthiest, observe ; not of the best born. Fitness to rule does not come with successful speculation, nor with hereditary idleness. Plato would say the only fit man to rule was the Philosopher. Ruskin would say that among our English Squires may even yet be found the best material for governing men. Carlyle said the Leaders of Industry, if Industry is ever led, are virtually the Captains of the world. But whoever he be, he must be found by standard of Reason, not by any fetish-worship of money or rank. How long it will be till great nations recognise that the right of self-government involves the corresponding duty of educating its leaders by a special training, it is hard to say. We who recognise the gravity of the issue have no right to leave either the choice or the education to hap-hazard.

Hear what Plato proposes in the selection of his governing class, and compare it with our ways of selecting the same. After training the most promising youths—for Plato, like Carlyle, would have us deal only with the best material—in the ordinary Greek accomplishments, a selection was to be made of those fit for higher honours. From the age of twenty to thirty, they were to study science and the natural relation of the sciences. At thirty a further selection was to be made and the chosen few be introduced gently to philosophy. This study was to continue for five years, at the end of which they were to be sent into active working life,—not as leaders, but as workers, to be tried and proved in all sorts of ways. This stage was to last fifteen years. And so, when fifty years old, the few who stood all trials would come to their con-

summation : "The time has now arrived at which they must raise the eye of the soul to the universal light which lightens all things, and behold the absolute good : for that is the pattern according to which they are to order the State, and the lives of individuals, and the remainder of their own lives also, making philosophy their chief pursuit : but, when their turn comes, toiling also at politics and ruling for the public good, not as if they were doing some great thing, but of necessity : and when they have brought up others like themselves, and left them in their place to be governors of the State, then they will depart to the Islands of the Blest, and dwell there."* And all this is "not a mere dream, and although difficult not impossible, but only possible when the true philosopher kings, one or more of them are born in a State, despising the honours of this present world, which they deem mean and worthless ; above all, esteeming right and the honour that springs from right, and regarding Justice as the greatest and most necessary of all things—whose ministers they are, and whose principles will be exalted by them, when they set in order their own city."†

But where in all this is Liberty ? Exactly where one might expect to find it—realizing itself in sacrifice. In other words, the only Liberty thinkingmen have ever thought worth having, both for governing and governed, is the liberty that *subordinates itself*. This is Ruskin's Liberty, this is Carlyle's Liberty ; and I think I am justified in saying, that such Liberty is no more and no less than the Platonic Justice.

* Republic, vii., 540.

† Republic, vii., 540.

Having said so much of the direct influence of Plato on Ruskin, I go on to point out what seems to me one of the great aims of his life. Every reader of the "Fors" knows that emphatically it may be said of him—"from a child he has known the Holy Scriptures." It is evident enough to every literary student, that his wonderful style was mainly formed on the English translation of these Scriptures; and it is well known that Ruskin was brought up in unquestioning acceptance of their most literal interpretation. But as one reads his books in their order of time, it is not difficult to see where he passed from the implicit belief of a narrow theology to broader grounds. A history of that sort can perhaps only be read between the lines; but I seem to see that the result is, that for a time he is perplexed between the antagonistic spirits of the fiery Jew and the calm Greek; till he learns that religion is greater than all theologies, and the deep heart of man a nobler temple than any built by hands. However this may be, it is certain that he comes at last to recognise that the higher faith does not overturn the simpler, but embraces it; that the gospel of the many is also the gospel for the few; and that heaven is wide enough to cover with its arch all the beautiful forms of thought and faith that have ever flourished under it.

In other words, much of Ruskin's work has been the attempt to unite Hellenic and Christian ideals.

This is indeed no new thing for thinkers. It is but a shallow mind that comes in sight of the literature and history of Greece, without feeling that we have there an aspect of life

very much neglected by us ; an aspect, in fact, in many respects greater than our own. In the best of the Greek States, and in the ever present ideal of the Greek State, the individual citizen found the only freedom intelligible to him, and the State reached its highest conception of the whole in every part, and every part in the whole. A Greek State was organic, realizing its unity in difference. The one spirit breathing in all the members, it was not a congeries of individual elements bound together by an external bond of law and order, imposed by the many in self-protection from each other. Our modern States, realizing, as they do, Mandeville's epigram :—

“ Every part was full of vice,
Yet the whole mass a Paradise,”

would have appeared to a Greek as “Anarchy plus a Street Constable.” A Greek lived for his State : considered it as his very self written large. The feeling was kept alive by all manner of common occupations and enjoyments. Indeed the perpetual struggle among the several States for supremacy and even life, made what we call *esprit de corps* a necessity among citizens ; for every citizen was a soldier. Everything reminded him that he was a member of an organization greater than himself, yet of which he made an essential living part.

The consequence was that the Greek States had, for the most part, one only form of aristocracy, the aristocracy of brains. The best men invariably rose to the top. Society was not a slow

evolution as with us, where it takes a long, almost unconscious process till the little leaven leavens the whole lump. A wise tyrant or an eloquent teacher had it in his power to carry through the most gigantic reforms.

It is sober truth then, that what we call now the religion of humanity existed to a high degree in Greece, as religion of the State. The individual was subordinated to the common weal. Man realized his entire dependence on other men, and so practically learned that he was his brother's keeper. This is the explanation of Plato's confidence in the feasibility of his Republic. When we remember that in Sparta the State took entire control of marriages, interfered in innumerable ways with family life, forbade all trading, banished all poets and artists, and enacted the most rigid sumptuary laws, it becomes evident that the extreme communism of Plato needed no other excuse to satisfy a Greek than that it was for the good of the State.

In its central idea then, (I do not say in its actuality), here is the perfect conception of human life: the annihilation of the individual self as self,—the realizing of the brotherhood of mankind,—the religion of humanity.

Now all this was changed when the Greek States lost their freedom, first before the conqueror of Macedonia, and then under the iron heel of Rome. Philosophy, which in the Republic had dreamt that the kingdom of God was within reach, shrunk into itself, and sought peace in the ideal of the Wise Man—the self-contained individual. Liberty was lost; and, in the loss, thought found no place for its foot in the kingdoms of this world.

On this great dead level of external law and internal dispeace, Christianity broke—literally in the fulness of time. The world was at the feet of Rome. Its society was a fever of luxury ; its religion a kind of despair. Thought already had retired to the desert, when Christ's words flushed the world with light. Immortality,—another world,—a personal God;—these but the dim speculations of a few poets and philosophers hitherto, were now given to the world of common men with all the force of direct divine revelation, and man again was free. But the scene of his freedom was changed. Not to realize himself on Earth, but to prepare for Heaven, was henceforward the dominant tone. For much later times was it reserved to read aright the lesson of the Master.

Now came the inevitable conflict between Paganism and Christianity. The result is history. Christianity conquered ; and for a time the kingdoms of the world became the Kingdoms of our Lord ;—only to fall back again in gradual corruption, till the incoherent elements of secular power and spiritual rule again broke asunder—the result being as before, that all aspiration was directed from this world to another. Here then the beginning of that long schism of Church and World, which has, down to the present, blinded men to the fact, that man's work is *in* this world, and his religion and himself to be realized in it.* All down this long period the ruling idea is the text, "My

* One may be pardoned referring to Matthew Arnold's "Obermann Once More" in this connexion ; the power of poetic genius to interpret the spirit of history has never to my mind been so clearly instanced as in this poem.

kingdom is not of this world," leaving out of sight the corollary,—"The Kingdom of God is within you." In Calvinism this former aspect has been pointedly presented in the dogma of original sin, and in the many doctrines that assume, if they do not assert, that the body is the prison of the soul, that the passions are the instruments of the evil one, that this world is the antithesis of a higher.

Now to say that this separation of church and world, of earth and heaven, of man and God, and this subordination of the world we know to the world we guess, seemed to Ruskin fundamentally wrong, is only to say that Ruskin was an artist. To one who has eyes to see the glory and wonder of creation, it needs no philosophy to tell that the Kingdoms of this World are at least good enough to be the Kingdoms of the Lord and of his Christ; and that, in very deed, "The earth hath *God* given to the children of men."

But then the Artist must go back to Greece, for to Greece the most perfect forms of artistic beauty belong. And the question which naturally rises is,—how could Greece in her Paganism reach an ideal of human society and a perfection of art which we cannot yet touch? The answer is simple enough. The Greek frankly took what the gods provided, and enjoyed it. His heaven was here. The other world, if there were any, was a thing to be staved off as long as possible. At best, death was a sad necessity, but there was no thought of any preparation for it which could interfere with his duty in the present. True, the shadow of Fate haunted him; but Fate was not an external law, but a part

and parcel of his own life. For the most part his Gods were glorified men, who, as men, were either indifferent or appeasable. This seems to me, on the whole, a fair view to take of the Greek religion ; for I think that we must put out of court the deep questionings of the greater minds like Sophocles, and conclude that the ordinary, like the philosophic Greek, thought that such questions did not matter very much, so long as they did not interfere with the morality and order of the State.

Against this, in modern times we have put, as I have already said, what might be called the religion and culture of Otherworldliness. The deep shade of a mystery before and a mystery after hangs over all our thoughts, while great religious bodies are even yet teaching, as a first principle, that man's chief concern is with a life to come.

Now we seem to find in Ruskin something like the summing-up of this long period of conflicting thought ; and this is precisely what we might expect in a great man, as the meeting point of all past cultures.

The two great conflicting lines I have indicated are, be it understood, these:—from the time of Plato on the one hand, and Epicurus on the other, philosophy and religion have hovered between heaven and earth ; sometimes with Spinoza losing all things in God ; sometimes with Hume denying everything but the sensational. The struggle between the two, with the varying fate of each at different stages, can be read clearly enough in the history of philosophy—from Descartes, in the beginning of modern thought, claiming freedom to doubt in all departments except that fenced

in by the Church, down to Hegel in the end, gathering up all the tangled lines of past philosophies, and working out the organic wholeness of all things in God.

And is not the converging of the two lines witnessed in the sonorous words of St. George's Oath, which, I imagine, may be taken as the summary of Ruskin's religion :—

- I.—I trust in the Living God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things and creatures visible and invisible. I trust in the kindness of His law, and the goodness of His work. And I will strive to love Him, and keep His law, and see His work, while I live.
- II.—I trust in the nobleness of human nature, in the majesty of its faculties, the fulness of its mercy, and the joy of its love. And I will strive to love my neighbour as myself, and, even when I cannot, will act as if I did.
- III.—I will labour, with such strength and opportunity as God gives me, for my own daily bread ; and all that my hand finds to do, I will do with my might.
- IV.—I will not deceive, or cause to be deceived, any human being for my gain or pleasure ; nor hurt, or cause to be hurt, any human being for my gain or pleasure ; nor rob, or cause to be robbed, any human being for my gain or pleasure.
- V.—I will not kill nor hurt any living creature needlessly, nor destroy any beautiful thing, but will strive to save and comfort all gentle life, and guard and perfect all natural beauty, upon the earth.
- VI.—I will strive to raise my own body and soul daily into higher powers of duty and happiness ; not in rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and

honour of others, and for the joy and peace of my own life.

VII.—I will obey all the laws of my own country faithfully; and the orders of its monarch, and of all persons appointed to be in authority under its monarch, so far as such laws or commands are consistent with what I suppose to be the law of God; and when they are not, or seem in anywise to need change, I will oppose them loyally and deliberately, not with malicious, concealed, or disorderly violence.*

If I read Ruskin aright in this regard, his charge against modern modes of thought is: first, that we do not recognise the sacredness of Nature as the revelation of God, and of man as the interpreter of God in Nature; but constantly separate the two, and think that man can live a noble life independently of beauty, and that beauty can exist independently of man; whereas the world we live in is the world we make, and to hurt either is to hurt both: and second, that we make too much in our religion of the compensating functions of a *future* life, and too little of the divinity of man in *this*. Is not the present-day world's judgment on Nature very much this;—There is no beauty but Utility, and Utility has nothing to do with Beauty: and on Man;—Every man for himself, and Devil take the hindmost?

What I have tried to do thus far is: first, to point out the direct influence of Plato on Ruskin; and, second, to indicate what I conceive to be one great aim of Ruskin's life, uniting Hel-

* Fors, lviii.

lenic and Christian ideals. Guided by these clues, I shall try now to point out, in some sort, the leading ideas of his early and later writings, following in this his own hint: "in many arts and attainments, the first and last stages of progress—the infancy and the consummation—have many features in common, while the intermediate stages are wholly unlike either, and are farthest from the right." If I am at all right in what I said before, we should find the confirmation of it in this way.

Let us begin with the "Seven Lamps of Architecture." Its main teaching I think, is this:—

Architecture is great just as it is the production of a *MAN*, working up to the height of his capacity, doing his work joyously, and putting his whole life in it because his work is also his pleasure—"noble or ignoble in proportion to the fulness of life of which it bears evidence." "We have certain work to do for our bread, and that is to be done strenuously; other work to do for our delight, and that is to be done heartily; neither is to be done by halves and shifts, but with a will, and what is not worth this effort is not to be done at all."

Further, true work is not done for hire or reward, but as a duty; yet a duty which is man's highest right, his self-assertion—"his very self cut into the stone, and left there for a memorial;" its sufficient acknowledgment that of "well done, good and faithful servant." *Servant*, observe; for the whole principle of such work is Obedience:—"the highest greatness and the highest wisdom are shown, the first by a noble submission to, the second by a thoughtful providence for, certain voluntarily admitted

restraints." And this submission is to come in two ways—by veneration for the works of God, and knowledge of the powers and meaning of Man:—"all lovely forms and thoughts are directly taken from natural objects, and as these objects are the most common, the world becomes sacred even in its commonest aspects; amid all which man stands out as the great problem."

And lastly, all such work is not for ourselves, but for the great common weal of man—not in Godless competition for the sake of present living, but in enduring faith that the next age needs our work. "Men cannot benefit those that are with them as they can benefit those who come after them, and of all the pulpits from which human voice is ever sent forth, is none from which it reaches so far as from the grave."*

These I think to be the main lessons of the "Seven Lamps." If one might sum up in a word, it would be:—Architecture is only great as it expresses the obedient loving work of *Man*.

Turning now to "Modern Painters," the chief ideas—so far as one can condense such a work—seem to me these.

In the main we have all the great lessons of the "Seven Lamps," in the assertion of what constitutes goodness and greatness of work both in art and conduct. I give them shortly in the *ipsissima verba*.

"The thoroughly great men are those who have done everything thoroughly, and who, in a word, have never despised anything, however small, of God's making." No respect is due in art to any work done under a man's best. Work done, not for

* Seven Lamps of Architecture, 43, 105, 174, 186. Edit. 1880.

ire, "for no pay is indeed receivable by any true man ; but power is receivable by him in the love and faith you give him ; . . . as the flower is gnawed by frost, so every human heart is gnawed by faithlessness."* And work done under severest self-restraint—for the following of beauty brings the artist always under a sterner dominion of mysterious law, "brightness being continually based upon obedience, and all majesty only another form of submission." †

The exact current contrary of all this was happily formulated in an *Athenæum* criticism quoted in the introduction to Vol. I., Second Edition, which runs thus:—"Landscape painting must not be reduced to mere portraiture of inanimate substances, Denner-like portraiture of the earth's face. Ancient landscapists took a broader, deeper, higher view of their art ; they neglected particular traits and gave only general features. Thus they attained mass and force, harmonious union and simple effect, the elements of grandeur and beauty." To which Ruskin's answer was : "It is just as impossible to generalize granite and slate, as it is to generalize a man and a cow. An animal must be either one animal or another animal ; it cannot be a general animal, or it is no animal : and so a rock must be either one rock or another rock ; it cannot be a general rock, or it is no rock. If there were a creature in the foreground of a picture, of which he could not decide whether it was a pony or a pig, the *Athenæum* critic would perhaps affirm it to be a generalization of pony and

* V. 351.

† V. 150.

pig, and consequently a high example of 'harmonious union and simple effect.' But I should call it simple bad drawing." *

Besides these repeated ideas, we have the following new lines of thought. Of the design and scope of "Modern Painters," he says ;—"The main aim and principle of the book is that it declares the perfectness and the eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to, that." †

As to the first, the perfectness of the work of God ;—"There is need," he says, "bitter need, to bring back into men's minds, that to live is nothing, unless to live be to know Him by whom we live ; and that He is not to be known by marring his fair works, and blotting out the evidence of His influences upon His creatures ; not amid the hurry of crowds and crash of innovation, but in solitary places, and out of the glowing intelligences which he gave to men of old." ‡ "This we know, that there will come a time when the service of God shall be the beholding of Him." § "We see that Dante, as the great prophetic exponent of the Middle Ages, has, by the lips of the spirit of Matilda, declared the mediæval faith ;—that all perfect active life was 'the expression of man's delight in God's work,' || this passage "embodying in a few syllables the *sealing* difference between the Greek and the mediæval, in that the former sought the flower herb for his own uses, the latter for God's honour ;" ¶—these two

* Preface xxx., 2nd Ed.

† V. Preface xi., xii.

‡ II., 7.

§ II., 132.

|| III., 223.

¶ III., 224.

aims, observe, being exactly the two sides which I said that Ruskin has tried to unite.

As to the second, the work of man ;—"In these books of mine," he says, "their distinctive character, as essays on art, is their bringing everything to a root in human passion or human hope. Arising first not in any desire to explain the principles of art, but in the endeavour to defend an individual painter from injustice, they have been coloured throughout,—nay, continually altered in shape, and even warped and broken, by digressions respecting social questions, which had for me an interest tenfold greater than the work I had been forced into undertaking. Every principle of painting which I have stated is traced to some vital or spiritual fact ; and in my works on architecture the preference accorded finally to one school over another, is founded on a comparison of their influence on the life of the workman—a question by all other writers on the subject of architecture wholly forgotten or despised." *

The reason of this constant reference to man is simply that he is the Sun of creation, the mirror of the mind of God. "A mirror, dark, distorted, broken, use what blameful terms you please of its state ; yet in the main, a true mirror, out of which alone, and by which alone, we can know anything of God at all—a tremulous crystal, waved as water poured out upon the ground ;—you may defile it, despise it, pollute it, at your pleasure, and at your peril ; for on the peace of those weak waves must all the heaven you shall ever gain be first seen ;

* V., 201.

and through such purity as you can win for those dark waves, must all the light of the risen Sun of righteousness be bent down, by faint refraction. Cleanse them, and calm them, as you love your life. Therefore it is that all the power of nature depends on subjection to the human soul." *

And so all great art is one of two things, or both of them—the expression of man's delight in God's work, or the expression of man's delight in man as the most wonderful piece of God's workmanship.

"All art which involves no reference to man is inferior or nugatory. And all art which involves misconception of man, or base thought of him, is in that degree false and base."† Therefore all the great artists made failure and wreck in proportion that they separated man from nature, or man from God—from Angelico, habitually incognisant of any earthly pleasure, to Turner painting "the labour of men, their sorrow, and their death," living without faith, and dying without hope.

These thoughts serve to explain two principal theories of art peculiar to Ruskin.

The first is his definition of great art :—"That art is the greatest which conveys to the mind of the spectator, by any means whatsoever, the greatest number of the greatest ideas." ‡ "No weight, nor mass, nor beauty of execution is able to outweigh one grain or fragment of thought." And again, "the difference between great and mean art lies wholly in the nobleness of the end to which the effort of the painter is addressed, . . .

* V., 203-205.

† V., 206-207.

‡ I., 7-11.

so that true criticism of art never can consist in the mere application of rules ; it can be just only when it is founded on quick sympathy with the innumerable instincts and changeful efforts of human nature, chastened and guided by unchanging love of all things that God has created to be beautiful, and pronounced to be good." *

The second theory of art is that it is an inspiration—"not a teachable nor gainable thing, but *the expression of the mind of a God-made great man* ; that, teach or preach, or labour as you will, everlasting difference is set between one man's capacity and another's, and that this God-given supremacy is the priceless thing, always just as rare in the world at one time as another." †

The practical result of all which teaching gives us the lesson of Ruskin's own life—perhaps Ruskin's greatest lesson—that for all but the heaven-made great men, the proper work is not what is called original production, but the reverent study and explication of the thought of others.

"Modern Painters" cannot be summed up more perfectly than in his own words :—"It teaches the perfectness and eternal beauty of the work of God, and tests all work of man by concurrence with, or subjection to that."

To come now to the "Stones of Venice"—analysis getting easier as we find that the ideas of "Modern Painters" and the "Seven Lamps" are applied practically here—note first the general summing-up exactly as before. "Here, therefore, let me finally and firmly enunciate the great principle to which all that has

* III., 23.

† III., 147-148.

hitherto been stated is subservient:—that art is valuable or otherwise, only as it expresses the personality, activity, and living perception of a good and great human soul; that it may express and contain this with little help from execution, and less from science; and that if it have not this, if it show not the vigour, perception and invention of a mighty human spirit, it is worthless. Worthless, I mean, as *Art*; it may be precious in some other way, but, as art, it is nugatory.”*

Much of the book is technical and historical, and cannot be condensed. Briefly, it tells how Venice wrote her history in the stone. It begins with the foundation that she laid, on the barren marshes of the Adriatic, in the reverent worship of God, and the helpful service of man—“that first and fairest Venice which rose out of the barrenness of the lagoon, and the sorrow of her people; a city of graceful arcades and gleaming walls, veined with azure and warm with gold, and fretted with white sculpture like frost upon forest branches turned to marble. And yet, in this beauty of her youth, no city of thoughtless pleasure. There was still a sadness of heart upon her, and a depth of devotion, in which lay all her strength.”† But how she rose to the climax of her greatness, Byzantine changing into Gothic; and how she decayed in the gradual strengthening of a soulless renaissance—Titian and Tintoret, in their later days, “choosing the delight;”—the change “from the marble shaft, and the lancet arch, and the wreathed leafage, and the glowing and melting harmony of gold and azure, to the square cavity in the brick wall”:—all this must be read

* *Stones of Venice*, iii., 170.

† *Stones of Venice*, ii., 143.

in the "Stones of Venice" itself. It is the envisaging of the one idea, that the Venetian builders' art depended on the "moral or immoral temper of the state." And the justification of the place given to Gothic, over all other architectures, is that it distinctively gives the utmost scope for the expression of the mental state of the builders :—"Gothic architecture was, at all times, the architecture both of the Church and of the Tavern : the house of God and the house of Man showing thus their integral connexion."

To bring all this art teaching to a point. Evidently all these extracts,—which I believe to be central,—group themselves round a point, and that is, the Life of Man. Continual reference is made through all these books of Ruskin to two things :—the power of self realization in man, and the perfectness of all the work of God. But these two are always connected. Nature and man alike are the work of God, but man is that for which nature exists. Nature finds voice only in the soul of man : God reveals Himself only in the dark mirror. Between the silent witness and the breathing image lie the action and reaction of life ; in which interaction it becomes known that God is present in His work, not only as author but as actual life, and the highest religion is seen to be, not a mystical devotion, but a living service—work is worship.

If this is not distinctively an Art theory it is because Ruskin's theory of Art does not separate itself from his theory of Life. Everything in Art is brought to a root in human passion or human hope. It is not a theory of Painting ; it is not a theory of art. It assumes that technical skill is there, and that the special

of Architecture: it has nothing to do with the technical part of any inspiration is there, and then it shows how, in all Art worth the name, these are subordinated to great moral ends, and become the visible history of a noble mind.

Have we not in this the Platonic spirit translated into the language of Art? We should look in vain for a separate theory of Art in Plato. In the Republic he comes into rough collision with the advocates of "Art for Art's sake," and deals but scant justice, one is inclined to think, to those whose art infringed on the well-being of the State. His, in fact, is a theory of Life, the central thought of which is, the realization of the individual only by the loss of his separate interests in the larger life of the State.

What is more than this in Ruskin's theory belongs to the Christian ideal. The Hellenic ideal was the rounding and perfecting of human life. The mediæval Christian ideal subordinated this human life in view of a world to come. These two sides seem to me to be united in that theory which makes all great Art the expression of man's delight in God's work, while it changes the religious outlook from a future Heaven, to a world which is the present realization of Deity.

Having said so much of his earlier writings, which are primarily treatises on Art, let us turn to the great book of his later life, the "Fors Clavigera," and see whether the same Platonic spirit is not evident in it.

"Do you read Ruskin's Fors Clavigera? which he cheerily tells me gets itself reprinted in America. If you don't, do. . . .

There is nothing going on among us as notable to me as those fierce lighting bolts Ruskin is copiously and desperately pouring into the black world of Anarchy all around him. No other man in England that I meet has in him the divine rage against iniquity, falsity, and baseness, that Ruskin has, and that every man ought to have.*

The fascination which this book has for students of Ruskin is not easily over-estimated. There is no other book exactly like it; certainly no other where we have a great writer so completely at home. One might describe it as a *Commonplace Book*; for while a main design gradually develops itself in the monthly letters, Ruskin very often left the dictation of his subject to chance—the “third Fors” as he calls it,—and to this happy chance we owe some of the most valuable, as well as most charming passages in all his works. Its definite aim happily allows it the utmost freedom of range. In many parts too it bears the supreme interest of being autobiographical. Ruskin of the “*Modern Painters*” we venerate as the great religious art writer: Ruskin of the “*Fors Clavigera*” we love as a personal leader.

And just because the seven volumes of “Fors” are familiar talk, one may say of them what Ruskin says of the teachings of Heaven: “they are given in so obscure, nay, often in so ironical a manner, that a blockhead necessarily reads them wrong.” There is no obscurity in the “Fors,” if read continuously from the beginning; but people now-a-days will not take time to read so

* Carlyle to Emerson.

long a book. Now beyond all books that I know, this one admits of texts and extracts utterly misleading and damnatory ; and so long as an ingenious press can quote passages and suppress contexts, so long we shall get no justice done to the "Fors." What can the hasty reader make of a man who says that "Art in Oxford now is absolutely dependent on our power of solving the question 'why have our little girls large shoes;'"* or says that a singularly extravagant recipe for Goose-pie, quoted *in extenso* and with evident relish, is "closely connected with the primary intentions of 'Fors Clavigera.'"+ And yet there is probably no book of Ruskin's which has done so much positive good as this.

To give then any short summary of its main drift and purpose is impossible. It certainly begins as "Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain;" formulates into a definite scheme of social reform, having for object "the highest possible education of English men and women, living by agriculture in their native land;" and, in the fifty-eighth letter of the series, draws up the Constitution and Vow of the St. George's Guild. But this is no more than a back-ground, which serves to throw more into relief the concentrated thought and experience of a long life.

If there is one subject that may be called central in the "Fors," it is the crusade against current Political Economy, or rather against those current aims and ideals of mercantile life which have been sanctioned, even hallowed, by Political Economy. Briefly to sum up his charge against Political Economy:—It is,

* Fors, xxxvii., 3.

† Fors, xxv., 3.

he would say, an analysis of a diseased state of society; of a society in which material wealth is looked on as the goal of individual life, and the struggle for existence is sharpest and cruellest. Instead of being the Economy of a State, it is an economy which disintegrates a State, by putting individual interests before the good of society. It is an economy from which the greatest factor of human life, Social Affection, has been eliminated, and in which Self-interest or Avarice figures as the only constant element. On the other hand true "Political Economy (the economy of a State) consists simply in the production, preservation, and distribution, at fittest time and place, of useful or pleasurable things." The typical confession of Ruskin's economical faith is given in the words :—"There is no Wealth but Life. Life, including all its powers of love, of joy, and of admiration. That country is the richest which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings ; that man is richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the widest helpful influence, both personal, and by means of his possessions, over the lives of others." *

The point at issue might be put thus. Ruskin does not object to Political Economy, so long as it is confessed *Mercantile Economy*; that is, an analysis of the conditions of modern society on its mercantile side. But to any one who thinks, this mercantile economy is seen coming into constant collision with political economy, in so far as mercantile economy is selfish and individual. The true office, then, of the political economist

* Unto This Last, 156.

would be to point out in which way the interests of the nation can be best served, and the energies of the trader used for the furtherance in life and happiness of all the people; in which the main task would evidently be, not to investigate the laws which regulate the production, distribution, and exchange of material wealth, but to set new ideals of wealth or "well being" before the merchant. Instead of this the economists hitherto have gone little further than their analysis, and have contented themselves with indicating the laws of material wealth, under the conditions, and towards the ideals which a sordid self-interest has raised. In short, economists, he would say, have been merely anatomists when they ought to have been physicians.

Fortunately the days are passed when one might think it vital to defend Ruskin in this. It is a significant sign of the times, that the most earnest upholders of political economy do not any more treat it as an exact science. It is but rare now that an appeal to the "eternal laws of political economy" is taken to settle any question. Indeed, a careful observer of literature may well be perplexed at the position which the "Progress and Poverty" of Mr. Henry George has taken among general readers. It seems to justify the belief that political economy has been but slightly studied and little understood, either by the critics or the supporters of Ruskin. One is almost inclined to hint, that political economy does not come by intuition, and is not necessarily embraced in that wide circle of knowledge, which,—in deference to its entire uncommonness,—we call common sense. This much may be said, that the last great writer on political

economy, Professor Cliffe Leslie—who in this only sums up the gradual tendency of economical thinking for the last few years—has said that political economy is not a science whose conclusions are final beyond the state of society of which it is the reflex ; in short, that political economy is not a science at all apart from Sociology on the one hand, and Political Philosophy on the other.

Hence the economists may be right from their point of view, and yet Ruskin may be right from his ; and the whole question is, which point of view is correct ? If we take up this question seriously we are apt to get back to a much older one, the answer to which alone will settle it—What is man's chief end ? If it be “to glorify God and enjoy Him for ever,” we shall need some modification of our economical conclusions. If it should be “to fight for his own hand and enjoy himself for ever” the economists may be right. And yet a third answer is possible ;—things being as they are, we may go by economical rules ; but things being not as they should be, we shall occasionally break them.

That political economy, as hitherto taught, is not a final science, is being shown familiarly enough in much of our legislation, and it is curious enough to find John Stuart Mill and John Ruskin agreeing utterly and entirely on two measures often bitterly spoken of as “breaking through sound economical principles ;” these are tenants' compensation for improvements, and peasant-proprietorship. Even the very catch-word of “sound” political economy, Free Competition, sometimes seems

to be abandoned. Does it not look as if the sweep round had already come when we hear on every hand that the hope of the future is—Co-operation? And what I repeat is, that till we have answered this question—for what purpose is man in the world?—we cannot decide the quarrel between Ruskin and the economists. It is being fought out on a far higher stage than is generally supposed. Not every dabbler in philanthropy or brisk young man in business is able to decide it. The religion of a simpler age gave one solution long ago—in Communism. In the nineteenth century the solution is not so easy as in the time when the Christian Church could meet in an upper room. But the spirit of the age is working out its own problem; and although we are indeed a nation of shopkeepers, dominated by selfish ideals, and working unthinkingly on the old sordid lines, the world must ultimately follow its *thinkers*, however loud, even deafening, the voice of the workers may be. True it for ever remains, that the education of the general mind never stops. “The reveries of the true and simple are prophetic. What the tender poetic youth dreams, and prays, and paints to-day, but shuns the ridicule of saying aloud, shall presently be the resolutions of public bodies, then shall be carried as grievance and bill of rights through conflict and war, and then shall be triumphant law and establishment for a hundred years, until it gives place, in turn, to new prayers and pictures. The history of the State sketches in coarse outline the progress of thought, and follows at a distance the delicacy of culture and of aspiration.”†

† Emerson : *Politics*.

After what has been said, it is, I would hope, superfluous to say that such economical ideas as these are based entirely on the Platonic ideal of the State. Plato and Ruskin alike have said : "in the constitution of the Universe it is written, there is no wealth but Life."

To sum up the whole matter. If I am right in regarding the passages quoted from the early and later works as essential and central, it is not difficult to get at a general idea of the spirit of Ruskin's writings. They are indeed singularly homogeneous. To give us true views of the life of man ; to strip away the sordid theories that blind him to his heritage of admiration, joy, and love ; to show him the infinite beauty of the world ; to remind him that all that God requires of him is to do justice and love mercy ; these are the themes on which his changes are ever rung.

It is no use to judge such a man by ordinary standards. He stands alone, for his work is to point out the absolute truth, not to say how that truth may be realized in a faithless world. This is at once his glory and his condemnation. Ordinary men can scarcely brook the wearing of the prophet's mantle, even by a confessed great man ; we who know better, let us thank God for a great man, and study how we may use the pure truth he gives us to clear the tangled web of our own lives. For as Plato answered long ago, so Ruskin answers now : "I have nothing to do with whether what I tell you is practicable or not ; the only question is, is it true ?"

Yet must one pause before answering that question. It is no

light thing to indict a whole civilization. May we not confess that things are indeed far from right, without saying that the only way of reform is to overthrow? And here I think the most devoted admirer of Ruskin may remember with significance a passage in the "Modern Painters," which says :—"the most startling fault of the age being its faithlessness, it is necessary that its greatest man should be faithless."* The words were spoken of Walter Scott; we might apply them differently. Faithless, I mean, that in sight of this "roaring volcano of fate, of material values, glutted markets and low prices,"† he seems sometimes to lose hope and faith alike. It is the more necessary for us to remember that the mills of the gods grind slowly. The world is old; the modern spirit is very young. It is not to be wondered at that trade, so long confined to hand labour, to agriculture, and to supplying the wants of a scanty population, should shoot beyond its mark, when the enormous powers of steam and capital were put into its hand, and play with its edged tool till it discovers that such toys may cost too much. And when science is every day increasing the tremendous power of man, and wresting from nature the secrets we must believe a beneficent Creator put there, can we wonder that it is intoxicated with success, and thinks itself almost a god?

Through all this the world must pass. It is not possible to turn the wheels of time backward. We must attain through progressing. It seems inborn in man to believe that the former days were better than now. Even Plato thought the barbarous hymns

* V. 270.

† Emerson : *English Traits*.

of the Egyptians a music whose loss was to be deplored ; while Ruskin looks back to the sixteenth century with longing eyes. But while we look to the past for lesson, we must not look to it for goal. Every force that is in the world must have its evolution: it cannot be destroyed: it can only be guided or transformed. Self Realisation is the law of individual life ; it is the law of society also. In both cases we too readily forget that the true Self Realisation of spiritual beings is through Self Sacrifice.

“ Whosoever shall lose his life shall save it : ”—that is the very heart of Christianity. But up till now we have made much of Evolution, little of Realization. We have hailed every triumph of Art, every advance of Science, every rush of Trade as a good in itself. Art for Art's sake, Science an end in itself, every man for himself—these are our common-places. Is it not time to remember that the true glory of these is not in themselves, but in the help they afford to the healthy and beautiful life of man ? We have still, it seems, to learn the lesson of the Greeks : that art and science and trade must be sacrificed in their selfishness to come to their true life and dignity as ministers to the common weal. There is not one theory of Art, and another theory of Life. Everything in this whirling kaleidoscope of being falls into its place as it becomes minister to the life of Man.

It is the old Greek lesson which this Disciple of Plato has so faithfully taught :—on Earth there is nothing great but Man. And the great aim of Ruskin's writings, from the “ Modern Painters ” to the “ Fors Clavigera,” has been to teach this great religion of

humanity—that the truest worship of God lies, not in the shibboleths of creeds, but in the helpful service of man to man.

The honour of God in the service of Man—that is the spirit of John Ruskin.

NOTE BY MR. RUSKIN.

*"There is no word I want to add or change up to page 41 ;
"but, as regards what follows, I would like to add that, while I
"admit there is such a thing as mercantile economy, distinguished
"from social, I have always said also that neither Mill, Fawcett,
"nor Bastiat knew the contemptible science they professed to teach."*

